

# COMSTOCK MEMORIES: 1920S-1960S

## ORAL HISTORIES WITH:

**TYRUS R. COBB, EDWARD S. COLLETTI,  
JOHN A. ZALAC AND MILDRED B. GIUFFRA**

Interviewees: Ty Cobb, Edward Colletti, John Zalac, Mildred Giuffra

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Interviewer: Kathryn M. Totton

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### Description

Following the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1869, miners and speculators rushed into the previously unsettled area, and three new towns quickly sprang up: Gold Hill, Silver City, and Virginia City. Virginia City was formed around the numerous mine shafts sunk into the eastern slope of Mt. Davidson at the northern end of the lode, and its population soon exceeded that of the other two communities combined. The town boomed from 1860 through the 1870s, becoming the largest city west of the Rocky Mountains before the ore gave out around 1880. During that period, about \$300 million worth of precious metal was taken from the ground.

With the depletion of the Comstock Lode, Virginia City slowly lost most of its population, which numbered perhaps 20,000 in 1875. After the turn of the century, the profitability of gold and silver mining rose periodically, because of significant improvements in methods for recovering and refining ore. As a consequence, the population of the area intermittently surged and receded. However, in most years between 1925 and 1975, Virginia City claimed fewer than a thousand citizens.

During the Bonanza years from 1860 to 1880, Comstock miners were the highest paid in the world. Their prosperity, and that of the owners, often found expression through Gilded Age excesses. Many of these were reported by Mark Twain, who wrote for the Territorial Enterprise, the local newspaper. Virginia City's renown as a town that knew no limits spread and survived long after the reality had faded. Today that image is cultivated by local commercial interests capitalizing on the area's colorful past to attract tourists.

The town's economic and social bases began to evolve away from their exclusive mining orientation as early as the 1930s. During the Second World War, precious metal mining was halted by an act of Congress. A growing emphasis on tourism, arts and crafts, casino gambling and legalized prostitution was nurtured by the patronage of GIs from training centers in adjacent Washoe and Churchill counties. Following the war, the development of tourism and entertainment-related enterprises received further impetus when Lucius Beebe moved to Virginia City, purchased the Territorial Enterprise, and set about shamelessly promoting both the town and himself. Today mining remains cyclically important in the community's economy, but Virginia City's principal identity is that of a rough-edged tourist attraction.

This volume of oral histories contains firsthand accounts from people who were born and grew up on the Comstock in the early part of this century, and whose parents and grandparents lived and worked in Virginia City, Gold Hill, or Silver City. The underlying theme of Comstock Memories is successful adaptation, both economic and social.

*(Continued on next page.)*

## Description (continued)

While other Nevada mining communities with similar nineteenth century experiences became virtual ghost towns, Virginia City not only clung to life, it also managed to retain a strong sense of community.

Contributors Ty Cobb, Edward Colletti and John Zalac grew up in established Comstock families before the Second World War. Mildred Giuffra arrived in 1945; hers is the perspective of a newcomer who evolved into an old-timer. Each of the contributors was a good observer of what had been going on in the community, and all demonstrated excellent powers of recall. In these pages they provide firsthand information about mining and mine technology, elementary and secondary education in the 1920s and 1930s, Lucius Beebe and the Territorial Enterprise, the impact of war on the community, the growth of tourism, local politics, the elimination of prostitution in Virginia City, and numerous other subjects.

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An Oral History Conducted by Kathryn M. Totton  
Edited by Cindy Bassett, Shelley Chase, Linda Sommer and Kay Stone

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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## PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber  
Director, UNOHP  
July 2012

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## ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand accounts or descriptions of events, people and places that are the raw material of Nevada history. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history; however, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written records with which historians customarily work. While the properly conducted oral history is a reliable source, verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the UNOHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it does not assert that they are all entirely free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be approached with the same caution that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts,

diaries and other sources of historical information.

When human speech is captured in print, the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. No type font contains symbols for the physical gestures and diverse vocal modulations which are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that, in the absence of any orthography for such non-verbal communication, totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and subsequently a waste of the resources expended in their production. Therefore, in the interest of facilitating their use, it is the policy of the UNOHP to produce finished oral histories that are substantially refined versions of the direct transcriptions from which they derive.

Editors are instructed to keep before them the ideal of a verbatim narrative, but they will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. often shift portions of a transcript to place them in their proper topical or chronological context;

d. for clarity, insert words that can be clearly inferred but were not spoken; and

e. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were neither uttered nor implied, but have been added by the editor to render the text intelligible.

Each edited oral history is reviewed for accuracy by the interviewee before a final master copy is produced. Nonetheless, the UNOHP realizes that there will be some researchers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the limited editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording. Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

The University of Nevada  
Oral History Program  
Mailstop 0324  
University of Nevada, Reno 89557  
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## INTRODUCTION

Following the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1869, miners and speculators rushed into the previously unsettled area, and three new towns quickly sprang up: Gold Hill, Silver city, and Virginia City. Virginia City was formed around the numerous mine shafts sunk into the eastern slope of Mt. Davidson at the northern end of the lode, and its population soon exceeded that of the other two communities combined. The town boomed from 1860 through the 1870s, becoming the largest city west of the Rocky Mountains before the ore gave out around 1880. During that period, about \$300 million worth of precious metal was taken from the ground.

With the depletion of the Comstock Lode, Virginia City slowly lost most of its population, which numbered perhaps 20,000 in 1875. Since the turn of the century, prices of gold and silver had risen periodically, because of significant improvements in methods for recovering and refining ore. As a consequence, the population of the area intermittently surged and receded. However, in most years

between 1925 and 1975, Virginia City claimed fewer than a thousand citizens.

During the Bonanza years from 1860 to 1880, Comstock miners were the highest paid in the world. Their prosperity, and that of the owners, often found expression through Gilded Age excesses. Many of these were reported by Mark Twain, who wrote for the Territorial Enterprise, the local newspaper. Virginia City's renown as a town that knew no limits spread and survived long after the reality had faded. Today that image is cultivated by local commercial interests capitalizing on the area's colorful past to attract tourists.

The town's economic and social bases began to evolve away from their exclusive mining orientation as early as the 1930s. During the Second World War, precious metal mining was halted by an act of Congress. A growing emphasis on tourism, arts and crafts, casino gambling and legalized prostitution was nurtured by the patronage of GIs from training centers in adjacent Washoe and

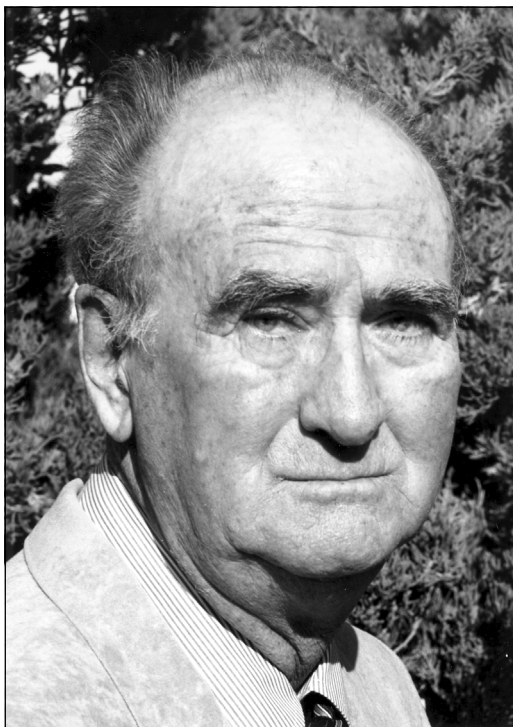
Churchill counties. Following the war, the development of tourism and entertainment-related enterprises received further impetus when Lucius Beebe moved to Virginia City, purchased the Territorial Enterprise, and set about shamelessly promoting both the town and himself. Today mining remains cyclically important in the community's economy, but Virginia City's principal identity is that of a rough-edged tourist attraction.

Much has been written about the two decades that comprised the Bonanza years on the Comstock. However, little documentation exists of what has happened in the intervening century. In 1984, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) began research that was intended to develop a picture of life on the Comstock during that lengthy period when mining was fitful and there were no tour busses disgorging hundreds of people daily into the streets of Virginia City. We sought firsthand accounts from people who were born and grew up on the Comstock in the early part of this century, and whose parents and grandparents before them lived and worked in Virginia City, Gold Hill, or Silver City. Twelve oral histories were completed in 1984 and 1985, and with a grant from the Gannett Foundation in 1986, the UNOHP was able to continue its work and produce the oral histories in this volume.

The underlying theme of Comstock Memories is successful adaptation, both economic and social. While other Nevada mining communities with similar nineteenth century experiences became virtual ghost towns, Virginia City not only clung to life, but it managed to retain a strong sense of community. In these pages the reader will encounter a variety of imaginative solutions to problems that are attendant to economic uncertainty. Contributors Ty Cobb, Edward Colletti and John Zalac come from

established Comstock families, and they grew to adulthood in Virginia City before the Second World War. Mildred Giuffra arrived in 1945; hers is the perspective of a newcomer who evolved into an old-timer. Each of the contributors was a good observer of what had been going on in the community, and they demonstrated excellent powers of recall. Here can be found firsthand information about mining and mine technology, elementary and secondary education in the 1920s and 1930s, Lucius Beebe and the Territorial Enterprise, the impact of war on the community, the growth of tourism, local politics, the elimination of prostitution in Virginia City, and numerous other subjects. For additional sources of oral history information about the Comstock, the reader should consult the most recent issues of the UNOHP Collection Catalog and Master Index.

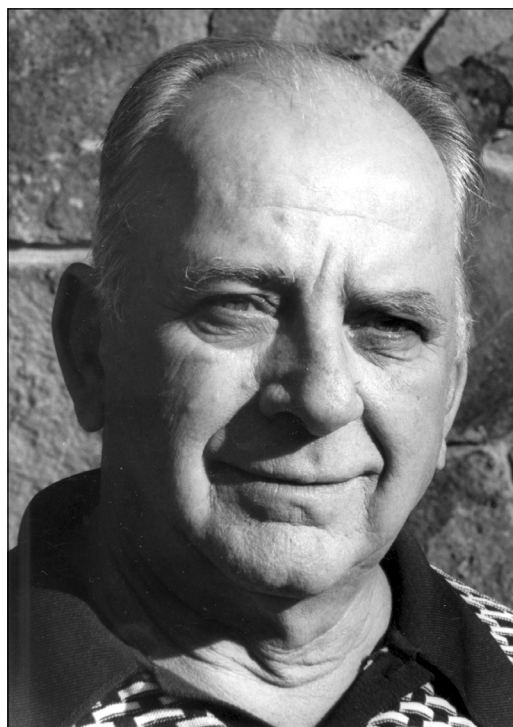
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UNOHP Director  
March 7, 1988



TYRUS R. COBB  
1987



EDWARD S. COLLETTI  
1987



JOHN ZALAC  
1987



MILDRED GIUFFRA  
1987



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## TYRUS R. COBB

### THE COBB FAMILY ON THE COMSTOCK, 1860S-1960S

Tyrus Cobb: My father was Will Cobb. He never went by William—just Will. My mother was Eva Harris Cobb. Their families date back to the early days of the Comstock Lode. My great-grandparents on my mother's side were named Simpson. In 1852, George Simpson married Catherine Forbes in Edinburgh, Scotland. I have the copy of the banns—the marriage license that they posted in the city hall a week before their marriage.

They then took a sailing ship from Scotland—I presume around Cape Horn, because it took several months. They went to Australia briefly, and then to San Francisco, and then to Virginia City. My great-grandmother had twins on the ship, but they died. Their daughter, Jeanette, my grandmother, was born in Virginia City in 1865, so I presume that the Simpsons came there around 1863. This probably makes us one of the oldest, if not the oldest, surviving Comstock families.

My grandmother, Jeanette, grew up in Virginia City. She married Richard Harris, who was from Cornwall, England, where most of the miners came from. In Cornwall the miners' skills date back several centuries. They mined tin back in the days of the Phoenicians, Romans and other conquerors of Britain.

Richard Harris and his brother, Mike, came over as young men and lived in Gold Hill. Richard Harris worked in several mines: the Savage mine, of which George Hearst was the main owner, and the Yellow Jacket mine, a big one in Gold Hill. He was on the shift that just had left that mine and was being relieved by the new bunch when the most disastrous mine fire in Nevada history broke out. Something like 47 men lost their lives, and he just missed that. I guess I wouldn't have been here if it hadn't reversed. [On 7 April 1869 a fire of an unknown cause started in the 800-foot level of the Yellow Jacket mine and took the lives of 37 miners.—Ed.]

Richard Harris and Jeanette Simpson were married in Gold Hill. They had eight children—five girls, three men. They were all

raised in the family home in the very lower part of Virginia City—half a mile below the Fourth Ward School, just below the mine dumps of the Hale & Norcross mine, which is a tunnel, not a shaft. When my mother, Eva, married Will Cobb, they lived in a house only about 200 yards from the Harris family. She didn't get very far in her homes from her birthplace. Almost everyone up there was born at home, not in a hospital. I guess they didn't have cars to get people to the hospitals, and they couldn't afford it anyway.

My mother's three brothers were George, Will and Arthur Harris. George stayed in Virginia City and ran a garage until his death in a fire. He was fighting a fire out on the Ophir Grade. Everybody volunteered to go out and fight fires, and he lost his life. It was a brushfire, such as we have all the time in Nevada, and he was caught trying to get his truck out when the wind changed. The youngest brother, W. S. "Will" Harris, was an insurance man in Reno and an amateur airplane pilot in the 1920s. He later became assistant warden of the Nevada State Prison.

The other brother, Arthur, traveled a lot in the West. He worked as an engineer in an American-owned mine in Mexico. His greatest adventure was spending a weekend as a guest of Pancho Villa. Pancho Villa was the noted bandit, rebel, patriot, whatever you think of him, but he was a notorious bandit at the time. He even raided American homes and a town across the border. The word got out that he was going to raid this mining community where my Uncle Arthur was working, and the superintendent said to him, "Arthur, would you like to take a weekend trip with me and see Pancho Villa?"

He said, "Not particularly," but they had to do it. They had a mule train. They packed a lot of gifts—pots and pans, medical supplies and some kind of food—and loaded them all.

They then went through desolate mountain country. As they looked up through these canyons they could see the soldiers standing with their huge sombreros, bandoliers with cartridges on their chests, and rifles. The soldiers would wave them on. They finally got to the stronghold, the fortress of Pancho Villa, who greeted them very profusely with, "Oh, my friends, you brought me presents! You didn't have to do this!"

They thought, "Not much, we didn't."

However, they stayed overnight under guard and left the next day. Fortunately, the gifts took effect and their mine was spared. Pancho Villa had raided others, killed most of the people and destroyed their property.

My mother had four sisters. One of them, my Aunt Ethel, was educated at the University of Nevada normal school [a school for training teachers—Ed.]. So now my granddaughters are fourth generation at the University of Nevada-Reno. Ethel was a schoolteacher in Washoe City and in Sutro, when there were towns there. She spent the rest of her life in San Francisco. She was a clerk with Nathan and Doorman when it was that outstanding... it had fancy glasses, dishes and stuff there.

Another sister, Sophia, or "Sophie," lived in San Francisco. Her husband was with the Immigration Service on Angel Island. He was killed in a hunting/boating accident. They were out shooting ducks, and he was accidentally shot and drowned. She spent much of her life as a caterer and a dietician for the Clift Hotel and later for San Francisco State College.

The oldest sister was Mary—known as May—who was raised in Virginia City and became a widow at an early age. She had one very prominent, surviving son who died there in January of 1988—Delbert Benner, a retired sheriff and highway supervisor. Her



husband, George Benner, was killed in the Union mine. The big mine dump is still there by the cemetery and very visible from Geiger Grade as you come in. He and two other men...or one other, I guess...were in the cage—that's the elevator of the mine—when some mishap released it, and they were dashed to the bottom and killed. Rescue attempts were difficult because the cage had broken. One fellow was lowered down, and another fellow named James Doolittle and my father went down, too—lowered on a cable.

*Kathryn Totton: When you say lowered by cable, do you mean just hanging onto the cable itself?*

They made a bight—a loop—in the cable. They sat in that and they lowered them down because the elevator—the cage—was broken.

James Doolittle was a mining student from Cal Berkeley, and he was there for the summer, studying mining as part of his career. He also did some amateur boxing. He later became an air force general and was the man who bombed Tokyo for the first time in World War II...General Jimmy Doolittle. [laughter] My cousin has a letter from General Doolittle dated back about three or four years. When they'd asked him about that rescue attempt from the mine, he recalled it and filled in details. The men were instantly killed. They went down to see if they could do anything for them. They were all dashed down about 300 feet or more. Both of them are buried in the Virginia City cemetery. That was 1915. George Benner was killed a couple of months before Delbert Benner was born.

*What did May do to support herself after he was killed?*

She worked as a maid in the hotels up there and got a modest pension. She kept a

couple of boarders and supported her and her son. The county had something like a \$20 a month widow's pension. They took care of all the widows and sometimes the elderly people. That was before Social Security, of course.

Delbert worked a lot when he was in school. I remember in high school, he had a paper route and was a handyman for Mrs. Minnie Davis, an elderly woman who kept the telephone exchange, stationery store, newspapers and magazines all in one building on C Street. Incidentally, her daughter was Susi Davis, the famous blind telephone operator.

I used to marvel at Susi. The switchboard in front of her consisted of little holes with a little flap of metal. When someone would call in, that would flip down and leave the hole open. She would then insert a plug with a wire in that hole opening with the other party and connect them up. You see, the phones up there were not dial tone in those days. We had a wall phone: you stood up, turned the crank several times and woke up the operator, and she would then connect you.

Susi Davis was a marvel. Although completely blind, she knew where every plug and every hole was connected. She very seldom ever got a wrong number. I watched her many times. She knew people's voices, even from childhood to adult age; she knew everybody. Sometimes she even recognized footsteps coming down the wooden sidewalk.

The operators were very helpful. Sometimes they'd listen into your conversation and would even correct a person. [laughter] Usually if you called for someone, she would say, "I think they went to Reno today or to Carson, but they should be back by 3:00." It seemed like a family affair. Everybody in town knew each other.

I've got another aunt; she's still surviving. The youngest one is Ruth Isabel Harris

Fields. Then my grandfather—her father, Richard Harris—retired, they all moved to San Francisco. She went with them, and my grandmother kept house. Ruth worked as a telephone operator. She worked 50 years and became a supervisor for the company in San Francisco or Oakland. She met a streetcar conductor, and they fell in love. She married Clyde Fields. He's been dead a long time. She now lives in a retirement apartment and travels almost continuously. She's very active at 85. She was the head of her lodge, the matron of the Eastern Star, and so on. She's very active.

Now, on my father's side, my grandfather, George Cobb, came from Blount County, Tennessee, up in the Great Smoky Mountains. At the age of 16, he left his mother's farm without her permission and went to Knoxville, where he enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War. Tennessee was a divided state—half Confederate and half Union. He had an adventurous, but brief, army career. He was in the cavalry—they called it the mounted infantry for some strange reason, but they rode horses. In a battle he was wounded and captured by the Confederates. In two months he had escaped from the Confederate prison. I can't track his life much further than that until he appeared in Dayton, Nevada, which was a thriving community around the 1870s. He was a laborer and a miner. I still have his charter as a member of the Laborers' Union of Dayton.

My grandfather married Mary Mahony, a native of Wales but of Irish descent. Apparently, her family went to Wales during the potato famine, when all the Irish had to get out—they were starving. So she was half Welsh and half Irish, I believe. She tried to head for the United States and was in a shipwreck in the Irish sea. She floated around on a raft for several days, apparently,

before she was rescued and tried it again. I don't know how she got to the Comstock or to Dayton, but she married Mr. Cobb there. They had three small sons.

George Cobb died at an early age; I think he was only in his thirties when he died. Mary was left with three little boys. She worked as a maid in the hotels in Virginia City. They tell the story that she had just finished mopping up the lobby of this hotel, and some lout came in with big, muddy boots and tramped right across her clean floor. She hauled off, whacked him with the mop, hit him on the head and knocked him flat. [laughter] Lost her job.

The boys were raised partly in the [Nevada state) orphans' home in Carson City and partly in a convent in Grass Valley, California, where the nuns took care of children. A lot of the Virginia City people had close connections with Grass Valley, chiefly through Cousin Jacks—the Cornish connections. You can go to Grass Valley now and still find families that date back to the early days when they all lived in Cornwall.

*Do you think your grandmother had relatives there?*

No, she had no relatives. Just in Wales.

In later years her half-brother came over to visit her. He had been a prizefighter in Wales, and he had a lot of fights, see. Fought in carnivals, took on all comers and so forth. They had a champion of Nevada or the West or something who lived in Virginia City. They were trying to get a fight for him, so they asked this Sinclair—I never knew his first name. He didn't speak too good of English—see, he spoke mostly the Welsh dialects—but he said sure, he'd fight him. He went around and borrowed all he could get from the Welsh and the Cornish people around Virginia City and bet on himself, won the fight, gave his sister

some money and went back to Wales. That's the last we heard of him! [laughter]

My grandmother's other two sons, other than my father—George and Sam—they're all buried together in the Dayton cemetery. George was a prospector. George never married, and neither did Sam. Sam was killed in an explosion. He was a dynamite expert, but there was a mishap in Dayton and it blew him and another fellow up. So a lot of them had violent deaths.

Sam lived most of the time in Dayton. Through him, I've got pictures of my grandparents—the only ones we have. Then he would go out on a prospecting trip, he would go to some friends of the family and leave his prized possessions with them for safekeeping. Many years afterwards—in fact, only within this last 10 years—a Reno man, whose family had lived in Dayton, called me and said he had a picture of my grandparents. I got to see my grandfather. He had a little mustache and a goatee of the Civil War style. My grandmother was slim and had real flashing black eyes and black eyebrows. So I got a good look at her, too—I have that picture.

*Did you know your grandparents well?*

No. Mr. Cobb died at an early age before I was born. His widow, Mary Mahony Cobb Pound, married a man named Pound after Cobb died. She died during my infancy. On the other hand, I knew the Harris people. I knew Jeanette Simpson Harris, my grandmother, into my teenage years. As a small child I knew her husband, Richard Harris. Incidentally, his middle name, was Ellery. The name runs through the family back in Cornwall, England. There's an Ellery who became the state treasurer in Arizona. We don't know if he was in that branch of the family or not. There was also an Ellery in the Revolutionary days, who

lived in Newport, Rhode Island and signed the Constitution and I think the Declaration of Independence. He was harassed by the British—they burned his store. He was chased out of the state and joined the Revolutionary troops. Later on he became a customs officer in Rhode Island. This was when we were established as a country. We don't claim him or the other one. We have no way of finding out if they are related or not. But Ellery is a name that runs back. The Harrises married the Ellerys a long time ago.

*Did your grandparents talk to you about their experiences in Nevada early on?*

My grandmother did—Jeanette Simpson Harris. She told me about seeing the first new water system. As a small child, her parents took her up to the Divide reservoir and they watched the water come in. It spouted up from a pipe in the middle of the reservoir. She said it was all mud and sand, and they were disappointed in it. Of course, that came from Marlette Lake and through that giant siphon through Washoe Valley.

My Aunt Ruth, the last of her generation, knew more about the Simpsons' coming on that sailing ship from Scotland. But I had only brief contact with my Grandmother Harris.

My father usually talked about when he and his brothers were raised in the orphans' home. He said they didn't have much over there. They made their own baseballs out of rags which they rolled and tied in wire, and made their own bats.

When my father came back to Virginia City, I think he stayed with his mother, but he worked. He left school before the fifth or sixth grade. He delivered the Territorial Enterprise; that's the way he supported himself. At 3:30 in the morning he would go up, take the paper off the press and deliver it to the homes.

He was very small in stature and had trouble getting a job in the mines because he was small. He wound up in the gold rush in Tonopah and Goldfield. He did some mining, and he washed dishes in the Chinese cafe. I think he was probably about 16 or 17. He worked in Virginia City; then he married my mother, Eva Harris. They lived in that house near the old Harris family home. This was right next to the mine dump of the Hale & Norcross mine.

One of my father's jobs in Virginia City was working on a tramway. When you get into Virginia City and look down the Six-Mile Canyon, you can see a small mountain sticking up like a thumb; that's called Sugarloaf Mountain. It's very visible from up in the town. At the base of that they built a huge mill called the Butters plant; a man named Butters built it. It carried ore from Virginia City from right near where our home was, and they called it the tramway. My dad used to go to work and ride in those cars. The tramway supported cable cars carrying ore from Virginia City. They'd carry them down the Six-Mile Canyon to the Butters plant. Many times in the winter, when the snow was too deep to travel on, he would ride one of those cars and leap off just before it got there.

He also did work in some of the deep mines. Then in the early 1920s he operated a stage—a bus between Virginia City and Dayton. He would haul mail, freight and a couple of passengers back and forth to his hometown of Dayton. Then he got a job driving a bus. The V & T [Virginia and Truckee] Railroad also operated an autobus, a motorbus, between Reno and Virginia City, and he became the driver of that. They had a lot of action in that one—a lot of passengers every day. Sometimes he'd make two, three or even four round trips at one time. There were

a lot of people moving back and forth, and he had the freight, too.

*Was the V & T still running to Virginia City then?*

Yes. But this supplemented it. The train would come only once a day and haul the heavy freight and sometimes passengers. My father drove the V & T bus in the 1930s and 1940s. He often extended his route to Lake Tahoe. He went from Virginia City to Reno to Carson, up the hill to Glenbrook, and then over to Zephyr Cove. He would deliver the mail and freight. Then he went to Stateline, Bijou, Al Tahoe, as far as Camp Richardson—which is not too far from Emerald Bay—then all the way back, and back up to Virginia City. He had a long day. That was just a single round trip, and he would get home late at night. That's why I never got to see much of him, really.

*Who were the passengers? What were they doing?*

Well, there were just a lot of people between Reno and Virginia City. The miners would come to Reno to go shopping and come back on the night bus. A lot of people'd come down to see doctors or conduct other business. Salesmen would go from Reno. That was the old Geiger Grade. It wasn't the paved one which we travel now; it was a narrow, dirt road, and it was precarious driving it. In the wintertime it was very difficult. At that time the state didn't have many snowplows, especially the rotary kind they have now. They just had a big V-shaped plow. Sometimes they were a little slow in rescuing Virginia City, which'd be snowbound for two or three days. At times there were some big drifts out on the grade. My father would get his bus, and

quite a number of the men of the town would gather with their shovels and ride with him. He would ram right through the snow drifts like a homemade plow. If they got stuck, then they'd all get out and shovel it clean.

*What was the make of this bus?*

It was called a Moreland. It was a long, box-looking thing. It was not too big around, but it was long, like a big rectangle, like a cheese box. It was powerful, though, and when they'd get going, they'd ram right through the big drifts. A lot of people say they still remember waiting for Will Cobb to get the stage out and break the way to Reno for them. [laughter] He did have a lot of difficulty getting out of there. My folks remembered the snow was so bad that only way they got any food into town was through the Sutro Tunnel. They would ship it from Sutro and take it right through on the mule trains or whatever they had.

Then my father would take a leave to get into politics. At one time he was sheriff. They had combined the job of sheriff and assessor, which is a strange combination, but that was an economy move. He spent more time in the legislature. He was elected two or three times to the assembly and then to the senate. He was pretty witty, and a lot of his quotes were used in the newspapers. He was good copy for the papers.

At one time, when Nevada was competing with other states for the divorce trade, my father had a spurious bill called the Super Quick Divorces. From a year, they cut it to six months residence, then to three months and finally to six weeks. So he introduced a tongue-in-cheek bill whereby a divorcee coming from the East would enter the state and sign the papers at Elko. By the time she got to Reno, they'd have the divorce waiting

for her. [laughter] We still have a Time magazine somewhere which has a feature of that little story.

He was really active in social legislation: old-age pensions, widows' pensions, women's minimum wage—he established that for Nevada—and quite a bit of social legislation. He also created the Nevada Boxing Commission. I was starting in as sports writer, and I proposed that Nevada get a boxing commission because of abuses. I gathered the information on it, and he put together a bill. It passed and created what is now probably the most active boxing commission in the United States., chiefly in Las Vegas, where they have many big fights.

In his last years, my dad worked on the highway department, and he was a county commissioner. So he did serve Storey County pretty well.

*He certainly did. What was his motivation?*

I don't know. He was pretty kind to unfortunate people. The legislation he proposed and things he did up there for old-timers and widows just took care of a lot of people. He's well remembered by the people up there.

*Aside from his tongue-in-cheek bill about the divorce act, what were his feelings on legalized gambling and divorce?*

He voted against legalized gambling because he thought they couldn't regulate it and police it. And they have had some problems with that. He was right there. He also was the first...maybe not the first...to propose a lottery for Nevada to support old-age pensions. But it failed. The rumor was that the big gambling casinos were against it and influenced opposition to it. Anyway,



it didn't pass, and now 50 years later they're still bringing up the lottery because they've been so successful in California, Ohio, New Hampshire and Oregon. So Will Cobb will be remembered for a lot of things. If they ever pass a lottery, why, he'll be vindicated. [laughter]

*Was your mother born in Virginia City?*

Yes. She was born in the house down where the abandoned Hale & Norcross mine and mill are now. Her mother was born about the same place, too. So we do have a few roots up there.

*Which school in Virginia City did your mother go to?*

She went to the Fourth Ward School. I think she dropped out of school to get married, so I don't think she ever got her diploma. She lived her last years in Reno. Will died about 10 years before her.

*Then did they leave Virginia City?*

In the late 1960s.

*Did your mother ever work outside the home?*

Yes. She worked in a bakery in Virginia City, helping cook. I don't know the name of the bakery. It was in the middle of the main block of the town, a few doors from what is now the Delta, which is the biggest bar up there—a tourist attraction.

I used to help my mother as a small child folding boxes—those cardboard boxes that you put pies and cakes in. I can remember sitting down by the big oven and reading books by the light of a single lamp. I read *The Life of Muhammad* when I was a little kid.

That's about the only book they had available there. I think the book belonged to the baker. So while I was waiting for my mother, I would read that book. I don't know what the baker looked like or anything any more, it was so long ago. I was only seven or eight years old.

But she worked mostly there. In her later years, after my father was out of the legislature, she often worked at the state legislature as an attaché in the mailing room during the legislative sessions. She was appointed by Senator Jim Slattery of Storey County. Each of the legislators had the privilege of appointing a few people to the legislative jobs during the session.

My mother, Eva, was a very beautiful woman. She was active in the Women's Relief Corps. I think that was organized in World War I. She was president of that. But she was more famous as a cook. She made some of the recipes which her family brought over from Scotland and from Cornwall, including pasties. It's sort of like a meat pie, and it dates back centuries in Cornwall. They were round and covered with dough—crust—and in them were carefully chopped or diced sirloin meat and potatoes and sometimes little pieces of vegetables. This was baked. They were rounded to fit into the miners' lunch pails. In the old days, instead of buckets they had pails that the men took to work.

My mother also made saffron cake. Saffron is very rare. She had some in strings, which is very difficult to get now. And she made very delicious dandelion wine. Lucius Beebe, a gourmet expert, could tell the age of a wine and where it came from in France. He said that hers was also equal to the greatest wines of France! [laughter] I just can't describe all the dishes that she was famous for. She cooked three big, heavy meals a day. My children and some of my grandchildren always enjoyed going up there because of her famous meals.

She and her sister, May Benner, were known as some of the best cooks in the West.

*How many children did your mother have?*

Just me. I have three cousins, all descendants of the Harris family, including Delbert Benner. There's a cousin named Glen Harris, who's now living down by Jackson, California or Sutter Creek. He operated the garage when his father, George Harris, died in that fire. There's another cousin, Kramer, in Santa Rosa—a retired San Francisco police captain.

#### **GROWING UP IN VIRGINIA CITY, 1915-1930S**

I was born in Virginia City on September 21, 1915. I was born at home like all the rest of us—in that house down by the Hale & Norcross mine dumps. Incidentally, 19 years later I was working in a mill which was built on that same site [Arizona-Comstock mill] and also on a tailings pond below the mill that was built where the Harris home was. It was old home week for me, working where I was born and my mother was born. [laughter]

When I was born, Dr. [F. W.] Hodgins came down. He was the one-man medical corps of Virginia City. We had a doctor and a dentist in Virginia City.

The dentist, Will Lawson, had his office on the main street right next to my uncle's garage, which is now a casino. He was a legend. He was a typical New Englander, I guess. I remember that he would never give shots. If he treated people he'd give them chloroform, but he was an advocate of a shot of whiskey—no matter what your age—before he pulled a tooth or drilled. [laughter]

Will Lawson had a brother, Jim Lawson, in Silver City, who was quite a character, a

joker. He had an everything type store. He had everything from miners' boots to aspirin tablets in his place—everything—just stacks of them. He also had the only telephone exchange. He was the operator for the city. He was the agent for several defunct mines, for the water company and many other things down there.

There are things about being a kid in Virginia City which were unique to that area, I'm sure. The place was full of deserted mine workings. We used to get in and climb all around them. We would go by empty or open mine shafts—they never covered them or fenced them in in those days—and we'd just drop rocks or things down to hear when they would hit bottom. It took quite a while to.... We would also drop square nails down the mine shafts. In the old days all the houses used handmade square nails. They were hammered out by the blacksmiths, not by machines. If you threw them down a certain way, they would make a whistling, humming noise. We spent hours throwing them like you would a football. We dropped them down the old shafts, and we'd climb around these mine workings. If our parents knew it, they would have been horrified, but I don't think there were any real accidents at that time.

We did improvise a lot. There was a playground dating back from the old days. It's down near where the high school and the tennis courts are now. The playground was made out of massive wood. The slide, of course, was lined with metal. The teeter-totter and the merry-go-round were wood and metal. The playground was very dilapidated when I was in high school, and nobody used it.

We had a homemade football team. We didn't have a coach or anything, but we had our own team. We asked the county commissioners if we could have that field

for games, and they said, "Well, not as long as the playground is standing." As long as it's standing—they emphasized that. So the next day it wasn't standing. We had torn it all down, and then we threw it over the mine dump. They said, "Well, you might as well make your field," and they loaned us a grader. We played there.

We also were about the third generation to play baseball on what they called the pan mill field. That was an area where [John] Mackay and [James] Fair and the Bonanza kings had a mill. They used big pans of chemical mixtures to handle some of their prize ore. When that was abandoned and the mill was gone, the field was used to work the ore with mules dragging big scoops back and forth, like plows. Then that was abandoned, and they made a homemade baseball field out of it. My father played there on that field. And so it dated back to the early days of this century, as a baseball field. The right field and first base areas were mine dumps. The left side dropped off about 10, 15 feet, so the third basemen had to watch themselves. If a foul ball went over the backstop, it rolled down the Six-Mile Canyon.

So we played there. We would rake it, and in a short time pieces of quartz would work their way up through the playing surface. The balls would take some terrible bounces. Everybody had bruises all the time from that.

We also had a homemade swimming pool. Now they have a beautifully well-operated and constructed pool up there. Our homemade one was higher on the mountain at a place called Byrne's Ravine. See, there were several canyons coming down Mount Davidson. At Byrne's Ravine, the kids formed a dam. They made their own dam shoveling dirt into the lower end, and they filled up the upper end with water running down from the flume. The town was serviced by the water company with

a wooden flume, and somehow mysterious holes would appear in that area of the flume. The water would run down and get into our Byrne's pond. Actually, it was more like a mud wallow from Africa, I think. But it was five feet deep in some places. Sometimes there was a lot of junk in there. Then the county would send up some workmen, and they would blast our dam and repair the holes in the flume. We would be quiet for a little while, but like beavers we would repair and do it over again. There were about two generations that used Byrne's pond. A lot of us learned how to swim there, or to at least paddle around.

\* \* \* \* \*

No account of a kid on the Comstock would be complete without a mention of coasting, both on snow and on dirt. In numerous abandoned or shut-up sheds were vehicles left over from the horse-drawn days. If we youngsters could obtain one, we used just the frames and wheels, et cetera, stripping off the tongues, seats and other items. Steering with ropes, these speedsters really whizzed down the sloping streets of Mount Davidson. The trouble was that they didn't steer very well and were difficult to stop.

The most famous adventure was that of the three cousins—Glen Harris, Delbert Benner and me. Starting on Howard Street, a block above Piper's Opera House, we whizzed with unexpected speed down, across C Street, through a group of Indians playing cards on a blanket at D Street, frightening the horses of Audie Dick's dray that used to haul baggage and mail uptown. Eventually, near the power station well below the town, we attempted a turn near the Chinese "joss house" [a Chinese temple or shrine—Ed.] and overturned. The town constable later issued an order against such coasting.



Snow rides were different. It seemed that there was always more snow at Virginia City than nowadays. That, and the streets, made for great sleigh riding. Taylor Street, past the churches and the present-day school, was a good route, and we could veer over one block onto Washington Street. This would take us nearly a mile below the business streets, and if one could negotiate a turn at the bottom, it took you past the old hospital. Another favorite route was at the North End, down Carson Street. If one chose, he could go all the way down Six-Mile Canyon. The only trouble was getting back: it was a long hike pulling a sled back up the mountain. Another popular ride was from the Divide down Gold Hill, which, however, was more dangerous because there was more traffic. On quiet days, a kid could coast all the way to Silver City. Once I, with a couple of friends, went all the way down Geiger Grade. We rode up on my dad's bus and zoomed down the grade, which was a dirt road in those days.

Most of us had store-bought sleighs, which could be steered with the crossbar handles. However, there were homemade sleds, with solid wood sides and mounted on iron runners. These were called "leg breakers" or "belly busters" with good reason. They were uncomfortable and hard to steer. Sometimes a couple of these were converted into bobsleds held together with a long plank. Some of the blacksmith shops in the mines constructed these bobs for the bigger kids. They traveled like lightning, but were awful heavy to pull back up. Sometimes we could hitch a ride behind an up-climbing automobile, truck or horse team.

Virginia City got its water supply from Marlette Lake above Lake Tahoe. The water ran from a stream or a ditch from Marlette Lake to the top of a pipe—this was at an altitude of about 7,000 feet. The water would

go down that pipe at such high velocity that it would cross Washoe Valley by Washoe Hill, by Washoe Lake. It went with such power that it would go across the Washoe Lake area and up a hill to the level of Virginia City. It formed a siphon. It was an engineering feat, one of the wonders of the engineering world, at the time. The water would empty into a reservoir about five miles from Virginia City. From there it would go by this wooden flume, which was about a foot and a half wide and about a foot deep. The water ran very swiftly. We always thought it was the purest water in the world, although at times lizards, bugs and rabbits would fall into it. A skunk fell into it one time. So the water wasn't the purest, but we loved it.

This flume had boards across the top of it which sometimes would break open. We would walk on that, too. It was about half a mile above Virginia City, and you could walk on that for miles. And in the summer water would be drained off into big tanks which supplied the water to the town for drinking and also for fighting fires. The fact that they were so high and the gravity was so strong made the fire hoses very difficult to handle. In those days they just had one sort of a nozzle, and it took two or three men to handle one hose. Otherwise the hose would flop around with great force and knock people down. So we had a lot of adventures with the flumes.

*Were there problems during the winter with the water system?*

There sure were. It froze up. The water tanks were frozen also. The water pipes to the houses and buildings would freeze up, and the poor fellow working for the water company would have to go around and try to thaw them out. So the only water we still had was in the fire mains. There was one at the Connors house next door to our house. In the

mornings the Connors boys would come over, and we'd get big boilers, washtubs and pans and fill them. Then we would carry them into our respective homes for daily use. We used that water for drinking, washing and running the toilets. Sometimes the pipes never worked for many days.

*How did they thaw the pipes out?*

With electricity. They had gadgets that they would stick....Sometimes people would thaw them at home with gasoline torches and such which caused many fires.

A house next door to our house on A Street later on became the property of Lucius Beebe—the famous author and sophisticated writer from Boston and New York City. Before him was an elderly gentleman named Dan Connors. He owned the Piper's Opera House for many years. I think he might have been related by marriage to the Piper family. He brought Nevada's first movies—first one in the state of Nevada—in the days of the silent motion pictures, and he provided his own sound effects. His son told me that if there was going to be a train wreck on the movie, his dad would get a bunch of tin and boxes and have some boys in back, and he'd give them the signal when the trains were going to crash, and they'd bang everything together. He had a comedy where somebody was going to steal some chickens. He got some kids there with a crate full of chickens—hens—and when the time came, they would shake the box, and the chickens would gabble! [laughter]

The opera house was very busy up until the 1930s. They had a roller skating rink; traveling theatrical groups came there; town meetings, political meetings, basketball games...there was something all the time. Mr. Connors then became a sort of recluse. He locked the opera house up, and he didn't

want to operate it any more. He wouldn't let anybody go in there; he was afraid of fire. His sons were about my age. One of his sons and I used to have a secret passage for getting in there. We'd go in there and roller skate. We had to crawl underneath some rickety old side stairs through a tunnel and into the opera house.

One day I was going home, and a couple of men stopped me and said, "Do you know how we can get into this opera house?" I said yes, and he introduced himself—Will Rogers, the famous comedian, actor and entertainer. He was with another ex-movie star named Fred Stone—an old silent movies guy. so I took them through our secret tunnel.

They got all dirty with cobwebs. Will Rogers found a poster dating back to the old days under this old stage. I've forgotten who all the actors were, but there were some great ones there that he knew about. He came up with this poster, and he had cobwebs all over. His wife gave him the devil for getting dirty. And he said, "I don't care...look what I got," and he gave me a dollar. [laughter]

Mr. Connors, who wouldn't answer the door for Will Rogers, had come out here in 1897. He had been a bare-knuckle prizefighter around Philadelphia in the old days before they wore gloves. He told me at one time when he fought, it was illegal. He and his opponent had fought for many rounds when the police came with a big raid. They arrested the promoter and some of the attaches there, the seconds and the referee. The fighters escaped and were rowed in a rowboat across that river in Philadelphia. In the outhouse of a farm by the light of a lantern, some doctor sewed them up. They were both pretty well cut up. The two fighters sat there on the john while they got sewed up.

Dan Connors was hired by the big newspapers to be a reporter and a commentator

at the big fights like the James J. Corbett and John L. Sullivan fight in New Orleans. He came out to Carson City in 1897 when Bob Fitzsimmons beat James J. Corbett—Pompadour Jim—in, I think, 13 rounds. He stayed on, or he returned to Nevada; he liked it so much here. He married, began operating the opera house and brought in the first movies.

When I used to go over and visit Mr. Connors quite a bit, when I lived next door as a teenager, he would tell me about the Corbett and Fitzsimmons fight. He was showing me what a good left jab Corbett had, and he hit me right in the jaw. I still feel that blow! [laughter]

And he went on. He had rows of knuckles from broken bones in his hands, and he had big scar tissue over his eyes. But he lived to be well past 85. I can still see him out there with Indian clubs—they're big things for exercise. You swing them around like they're bowling pins. One of his frequent visitors, when he was around, was Max Baer, the colorful heavyweight champion of the world, who came to see him two or three times, enjoyed his company and gave him a big autographed picture. I can remember the signature: "To Dan Connors, who fought them all before they wore pillows." [laughter]

One of my best memories is the V & T Railroad coming into a barren place down on E Street in Virginia City. It's where they have the camel races now. It had an elegant depot at one time—a passenger depot. The V & T was painted yellow and had those fancy chairs in front where people sat. It had several tracks—they would switch back and forth, and the freight depot was behind.

The V & T came through a tunnel into that depot area. The tunnel is now blocked; they filled it in because they thought it might be dangerous after they abandoned the railroad. The tunnel was close to half a mile long and went right in front of where St. Mary's in the

Mountains Church is now and under where the school is now. As kids we used to walk through there. We were told not to do it, but naturally it was a challenge to go through it. The smell of that train smoke hung to the wood. It was an unforgettable smell. If the train would come through, we'd cling to the sides of the tunnel. Everybody said, "You're going to get sucked out by the air from the train and get run over," but we never did.

The train men would give us rides—take us down to Gold Hill if we wanted to go, and no charge—just let us ride on the train. On the south end of town was a big shed with a turntable, where they kept the extra engines sometimes at night. The engine itself had to back all the way up to the turntable. They would run the train right out on this turntable, and two men could turn that huge locomotive clean around.

I can remember when they brought back the bodies of a couple of fellows who were killed in World War I. I was just a small child. Everybody went down, and the train came in decorated in American flags, bunting and ribbons. They had two coffins there. I didn't know what coffins were, and I thought they were going to carry the dead men out physically.

We used to travel always by the Gold Hill route, which was a dirt road used before the main Highway 17 was constructed. About halfway up Gold Hill was a watering trough, which was a big, old, rectangular-shaped iron tub. Water was flowing into it—beautifully clear water. Everyone would have difficulty with their cars getting up Gold Hill. They always got to the watering trough. Then they would put more water in their cars, which were boiling over. And we drank the water. In previous years, the horses always got a drink there, too. It wasn't till 15 years ago, when the house which the trough was in front of was

torn down, that they found that the water from that beautiful spring actually came from a leak in the water flume. And it was just piped into the trough. I can remember the cars trying to get up Gold Hill. They would steam and puff, and they always liked to stop at the watering trough.

*Particularly in the summertime, I imagine.*

Yes. Of course, it was difficult driving up that road in the snow, too. Everybody had to put on chains by the watering trough to get to the top.

*Was there quite a bit of automobile traffic back and forth?*

Yes, there was. I can remember the people all had flivvers—Model T Fords—touring cars and different styles. Very few people got anything else but a touring car or Model T. Those were the kind that you operated with your foot pedal, and the gas and spark levers were on the wheel. We had a touring car. It had side flaps of cloth and isinglass. This was before plastic windows. Instead of glass it was called isinglass, which was some kind of transparent fabric.

When we'd go to San Francisco, it was a great expedition. [laughter] It'd take maybe 10, 12 hours. The big thing was to go to San Francisco or Reno and go to Woolworth's. And it's true—there was nothing over 15 cents at Woolworth's! So we loved to go there.

*Did you get an allowance that you spent there?*

Yes. We didn't have much. We would sell bottles run errands for people, and pick up dimes here and there.

*How often did you go to Reno?*

About once a month or maybe every two months. It was quite a trip. Geiger Grade was not a great pleasure. It was an old dirt road, and very steep and narrow—difficult in the wintertime. That's the road where my father drove the bus almost all the time.

*Was that road rebuilt by the WPA [Works Progress Administration] in the 1930s?*

The new road was built then. Maybe they did, but I don't think the state built it, because it's paved and a good road now. I think it was in the late 1930s.... Yes, it could be the WPA got in on it. They built the Virginia Lake in Reno, and the Washoe Golf Course and a few of them.

As a kid, I was fortunate—I think my lifetime spans several eras of Virginia City. They still call it a mining camp or a ghost town, but it's neither one now. A mining camp is the kind that comes and goes throughout Nevada, but this was a city. At one time it had at least 30,000 residents, and the buildings were permanent. After the big fire of 1875 most of the buildings were constructed of brick and stone. I've seen several four and five floors high. When I was a small child, all those big buildings were still intact, and Gold Hill, in particular, was very impressive. There were a lot of large buildings there. They're all gone now. They were cannibalized and torn down for their bricks and stone during the Depression.

That Frederick building was either burned down or torn down and was succeeded by something called the Sky Deck—I don't know what they call it now. It was a large, picturesque building. Another one I recall very well was where the Delta now has a big parking lot. That was called the Black building. It was a grocery store before my time, but it was still standing. And, of course, it burned

down. It was a huge building. Up the street was called the National Guard Hall. To me that was the center of the world, when I was a kid. I went to movies there. They had Cole's Theater. It was a stone building about three stories high in front and four or five in back on D Street. Until about 1938, the National Guard Hall was still in use as the basketball.... It had a huge...like an arena on the mezzanine part...or the main floor, and it was mounted on railroad car springs. You could dance all night or play basketball all night. It didn't seem to tire anybody out. When the Piper's Opera House was closed, the National Guard Hall became the civic and cultural center of the town. Basketball games, graduations, political meetings, rallies—many activities were held there. It had a large balcony, a stage and seats around. Upstairs was the town's only newspaper office; that's the last of the hand-set newspapers around.

There was a great big firehouse near the Castle, which is a tourist attraction—an old mansion. A hundred yards from the Castle at the top of a hill was the old firehouse called the Corporation House. It was about three stories high, wooden and had a big balcony out on the top where the firemen used to scan the city for traces of fires and alarms. It had a big fire bell, and they had horses at the alert, ready all the time. The horses stayed in position, side by side, with the harness hanging above them. When there was an alarm, one of the firemen would jerk a leather rope there, and the harness would fall on the horses. In a few seconds the men would buckle them up and take off in the cart. I remember this well, because it was well into the early 1940s, I believe, before they got fire trucks. I can still see Dave Tweedie driving the horses around for exercise every day. There are two hills leading away from that, and the horses went tearing down there.

They tore the firehouse down as a fire hazard [in 1948]. Everybody's sorry now. Somebody must have been impetuous and said, "Well, we better tear down all these old buildings. They're fire hazards." Many picturesque, historic buildings were torn down. It was really a sight to see that. I have pictures of it yet. I can remember going into the firehouse as a child and visiting the firemen. They had pictures on the walls of the old prizefighters like John L. Sullivan. And at least one or two of them would sleep there at night. They had a bed for the firemen and this lookout balcony.

Fire was always—and still is—the bugaboo of the Comstock. They had disastrous fires in the middle of the last century. The worst was in 1875 when two-thirds or three-fourths of the city was destroyed. The churches, the mine workings, the surface workings and all the business buildings on the north side of Taylor Street were destroyed. With them were destroyed many of the only copies of the Territorial Enterprise of the Mark Twain era. [Mark Twain served as a reporter on the original Territorial Enterprise during the early 1860s.—Ed.]

There's a fine book called Red Shirts and Leather Helmets by Steve Frady. I really recommend that for a good description of the old fires. I would also recommend the Firemen's Museum to anyone interested in Virginia City. It is excellent. They have very carefully restored the hand-drawn carts, the old pumper which took about eight men, four on each side, pumping levers up and down to get the water going. They've got many helmets, fire axes, trumpets, and great pictures. It's right on the corner of C Street and Taylor.

There was a grocery store in Virginia City—the N. C. Prater store—which used



horses for delivery well into the forties also. It was operated by a man named George Wilson, who was a horse bug—he really loved horses. He had a livery stable on the south end of C Street, about a block south of the Presbyterian church—a number of residences have been built since then on that side. He didn't rent horses; he just kept his own horses there and would shoe them himself. He had a couple of helpers. He also had the Prater grocery store. He was the last of the home delivery. People would send word by phone what they wanted at the store, and he'd have it delivered to their homes by his horse-drawn wagon or a single horse with saddlebags. A little friend of mine, a classmate named Norman "Peewee" Harris, would ride this horse with saddlebags delivering the groceries. Until his death, George Wilson refused to have a delivery truck or anything automotive.

I remember there was a store in the bottom of what they called the Frederick building, which was about three stories in front and four or five in back on Union Street and C and D streets. In the basement, facing D Street, was an old Chinese named Chung Kee—a very kindly old man. He had the little goatee that the old Chinese affected, and he had a general store. The shelves reached to the ceiling and were just piled with garments, knickknacks and whiskey. Two shots of whiskey for 25 cents, I believe, for the miners who would come off work at the C & C [Consolidated Virginia and California shaft] and stop at Chung Kee's to get a belt or two! [laughter]

There were a number of Chinese up there. Another one, Charlie Ching, had a restaurant next door to what's now the Delta. It was very popular, and he was a very kindly man. He grubstaked a lot of out-of-work, penniless prospectors. I don't know if he ever got any return on what he advanced them, but he

carried a lot of people who were out of work during the Depression and never collected from them. Then there was a fellow named Charlie Wah who had a Chinese laundry or a restaurant. And Hughie Wong. Those were the only Chinese that I knew personally or vaguely.

*Did they have wives and families there in Virginia City?*

No. I think only Charlie Ching did; I think his wife was Caucasian. They had a Chinese temple down at the lower part of town, way down by the power company. It was a weather-beaten, old building. Inside there were a few statues, and things like banners or pennants hung up on the walls. Charlie Ching would consult some sticks. They had Chinese sticks in a little container, and the way you pulled them out would determine some fortunes. He always told my father he prayed for him, and then he consulted these little sticks to see how he'd do in the elections! [laughter]

*Were there any Indian families?*

Yes, there were a number of Indians. They were very poor. Some of them lived down the Six-Mile Canyon right near the old brewery and across the street from it. They lived in little hovels shaped like a beehive that they made out of tin, cardboard and paper. They still were standing the last I knew about them.

I think the old brewery was taken over by a religious sect. I don't know their name, but they did a lot of meditation. They would use these old, abandoned, Indian beehive-shaped places for meditation. They'd sit there all night. [chuckles] This wasn't too long ago—maybe 20 years ago. They just laid on layers of tin, scraps, paper and cardboard and made these little houses or huts out of them.

There were a few other Indian families. There was a family—their last name was Bob. Tony Bob is the boy I recall. And a big family whose last name was Jack. They were busier... they got into athletics a little bit up there and worked. A woman named Josie Jack helped my mother with the washing once a week. They worked out in the yard with the great big washtubs and did the washing. We had one Indian, Raymond David, that played football with us in our sandlot on Sunday. I believe he is still living in Reno now.

*Did any of the children go to school with you?*

Not in my class. There were a couple... Raymond David was about five years behind me in school. I think he was about the same age as Bill Marks and Hugh Gallagher.

One memory I have, which they don't have any more up there, was seeing the steam come out of the Combination mine. Now, the mine dump is still there on the southeast part of town—a hill—and there's just the wreckage, the remnants of the surface workings. Many publications about the state or about ghost towns always show that gallows frame, the big wheel and a few stone blocks.

The Combination mine was a combination of four different mines that went in together and built this shaft to service their different mines from different directions. At one time it was the deepest shaft in the world. I don't know whether they say it was a half mile deep or a mile deep; anyway it was very deep. [The Combination shaft was 3,250 feet deep.—Ed.] They ran into boiling hot water like most of the very deep mines up there, and they pumped it into the Sutro Tunnel. Long after it was abandoned, in the wintertime you could see huge clouds of steam billowing up from that. We could see it from our school.

I also remember the C & C mine, which John Mackay and his other Bonanza kings operated. The Big Bonanza was discovered there. [The Big Bonanza was the name given to the rich ore body which was discovered in 1873 by the so-called Bonanza firm—John W. Mackay, James G. Fair, James C. Flood and William S. O'Brien—and was located in the Consolidated Virginia and California mines.—Ed.] I can remember the smell of the shaft of the C & C. The steam would come up from down below, carrying these mineral odors—it was very intriguing. The hoisting engineer was Hugh Gallagher. He was a graduate of UNR, probably around 1909, in that era. He was a very fine engineer. He died fairly early, but his wife died first. A lot of people died up there from the influenza epidemics of the late teens and early twenties.

The Gallaghers lived about a block from us on A Street. Hugh Gallagher's oldest son, Mervin, became the state inspector of mines. His second son, Neil, operated the N. C. Prater store after the horseman George Wilson died. The younger brother was Hugh II, and he became a teacher, coach and school superintendent. There's a Hugh Gallagher III. He is in business in Reno. He holds the record at UNR for free throws in basketball. I can just remember Mr. Gallagher—a very kindly man. He gave us a little ride on the cage, the elevator. I can remember that very well.

*Didn't Mr. Gallagher go to Tonopah or Goldfield to work for a while?*

Probably.

*Was that a fairly common practice for people up there?*

Yes. Virginia City was in the down stage. You know how things were up and down

with the mining? A lot of people left to go to Goldfield and Tonopah during the early part of this century. I think from 1901 to about 1910 it was very lively down there. My father went down there to look for work when he was a youngster. He wound up washing dishes in a Chinese restaurant. Then he got a job in mining. People drifted back and forth between Tonopah, Virginia City and, of course, the other camps, too, like Eureka... even down to Belmont and over to Grass Valley in California. A lot of the old Cornish people and the Cousin Jacks or their descendants still live in Grass Valley. They were experienced miners. They were very skillful miners in timbering and handling their underground work, because mining dates back in Cornwall for many centuries.

I went to the Fourth Ward School from the first through the fifth grade. Then my folks moved to Reno on account of the change of [my dad's] bus schedule, and we lived here five years—1925 to 1930.

In Reno I went to the Southside School annex. The school is now the Reno City Hall, and the annex is now the Washoe County Library. Then I went to junior high school in Northside, which is now a big parking lot for the casinos on Fourth Street—Fourth, Lake and Center streets. It was a beautiful school, but it was very noisy. Fourth Street had a lot of traffic, so they tore it down.

Then my family moved back to Virginia City I think because they changed the bus schedule again. We purchased a big, white house on A Street at the top of Union—two blocks off the main drag—right behind the courthouse. It was next door to Mr. Connors's house which became Lucius Beebe's property. Our house was a great big, two-story house, which was built in 1876. We lived there from 1930... I think my parents lived there about 40 years. Of course, I went away to the university

and then moved to Reno. I've lived in Reno ever since.

Our house on A Street is still standing. People call it the Cobb mansion, but it wasn't a mansion...! [laughter] It's been renovated—restored—and has had several owners since then. It was restored by a more recent occupant, David Seaton, who I think is now in the Dominican Republic studying to be a doctor. He restored it beautifully. His former father-in-law had bought what they call the Cole mansion on B Street. It's a beautiful house now—one of the showplaces of the town. They worked months...maybe a couple of years restoring it. I don't know if Cole was a doctor or a mine fellow, but they had Cole's alley, which was a covered, wooden passageway from one street to the other, right in front of that house. As kids, we always ran through it because we were scared to stop; it was so spooky.

In Virginia City all the schools were combined in one building, which still survives—the Fourth Ward School. That's the last of the old-time schools. It was a three-story building. Well, it's four in back on account of being built on a hill. It was put into service in 1876, and it served into the late 1930s. I was not in the last class, though—people think I was, but there were three or four years after me before they built the new school that they have now.

The very bottom basement—which is only on the D Street side, the downhill side, because of the slope of the hill—was for the first, second and third grades. There was no kindergarten in those days. The middle part, the main floor, was for the middle grades—fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth. The upper floor was for the high school. Then there was an attic. At one time they taught printing, hand-set printing, and had a little gymnasium. They abandoned those during



the Depression. So the first grade through high school was all in one old building.

It was a very unusual lifestyle in the Depression. I was a teenager going to school, and they had cut out many services at the school. For instance, the girls' home economics was abandoned. The boys' woodcraft and shop was dropped. They dropped the high school yearbook. They only had three teachers in the high school. The principal doubled as a teacher and administrator for the whole school. The coach taught classes and coached boys' basketball and sometimes football. Then the woman teacher taught drama, languages, typing, shorthand and also coached girls' basketball.

My first principal up there, Clarence B. Tapscott, is still in Reno; he's an active attorney. I think he's the second oldest attorney in Reno now. I had him for two years at high school. Then the last year was John Gilmartin, who is deceased now. He was the coach when I was there.

My last coach and teacher was Jake Lawlor, whose name goes on forever at the Lawlor Events Center. That was his first job as a teacher and a coach. I thought he was a fine teacher—a little bit violent and vigorous, but a good coach. He was a very inspirational and scrappy coach. Lawlor taught English and, I think, what they called physical geography—that's sciences of the earth. He was a very good English teacher. He remained there for several years and had some fine basketball teams.

Virginia City for many years only had about 35 students in high school—about 17 boys. And out of those they had to pick their basketball team. I was number 11 on an 11-man squad! [laughter] I never made the tournaments; I was always lopped off. I just filled in when they were way ahead or way behind at the end of the game. I got in for a little bit. But under Jake Lawlor, his team went to the

state finals two years in a row. That's when there were no AAA, AA or A divisions by size. They were open tournaments, wide open. The little schools like Virginia City and Dayton had to play Reno, Las Vegas and all those.

Jake did very well with his teams. Some of his players are still around Virginia City. One of them is Hugh Gallagher, who just retired as principal of the schools. The new grammar school is named after him. Another is Bill Marks, who owns the famous Crystal Bar. His father had it, and even before him.... In fact, they had a signature book for visitors signed by U. S. Grant—General Grant who became president. He was president of the United States when he visited the big mines. He signed it. Herbert Hoover signed it, too. And many others.

*Did your family belong to a church in Virginia City?*

Yes, on my mother's side we have actually five generations who have been baptized in the St. Paul's Episcopal Church. However, it was not the same building all the time, because it's been destroyed twice by fire.

My father was an altar boy in his childhood in the Catholic church—St. Mary's in the Mountains Church. He left that, I think to go to work. That was during the era of Father Tubman. Father (Patrick) Manogue was the original outstanding priest up there. Then Father Tubman later came to Reno and built St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral here. Then I went to Sunday school in the Presbyterian church because that was nearby and the only one that had a Sunday school. The other churches didn't have Sunday schools. The Episcopal church was kind of hit and miss; they had active services for a while. They never did, I don't think, have a Sunday school—the kind the other people did.

*Were the churches involved in the community to the extent that they sponsored activities?*

The Presbyterian church has been restored a few times and seemed to be very popular for public affairs—plays, concerts and that. It's right on the main street, on the outskirts of the business section. They have services there quite often.

*When you were a child, besides the Sunday school, were there other activities?*

That's all. I guess there were, but I was very small when I went over there. It was only a block away, so I walked over there for a couple of years. But I didn't know what the adults were doing.

#### **WORK IN MINING AND JOURNALISM IN VIRGINIA CITY, 1930S-1940S**

*What was your first job?*

In Reno, when I was a youngster, I delivered papers. When I went back to Virginia City in 1930, jobs were very scarce. All through the thirties was the Depression, and it was very difficult to find even part-time work. As a teenager, I finally got a job down at that mill [Arizona-Comstock] where the old Hale & Norcross mine dump had been and also on a tailings pond below the mill.

Incidentally, the word tailings has been misused quite a bit. A lot of people have the impression that those mine dumps that you see in Virginia City, Sutro and around are called tailings, but they're not. They're waste rock. Tailings are the residue that come out of a ball mill. They had built a mill, and there's a rock crusher; then big steel balls of iron roll around inside and crush the ore. Then it runs through a process of separating the gold and

silver from the dirt. What comes out of the mill that's not immediately used—the valuable stuff—is kind of a waste, but they collected it for later use. They call that the tailings.

The tailings pond where I worked was built by deposits of sand. A trough was run from the mill down to the pond and was carried around on the elevated boards. My job was to pull out plugs, let holes and let the stuff run through from the trough. It would drop down on the banks, deposit the sand and run off as muddy water. My job was to shovel—we called it mucking; a shovel is called a muck stick up there—building up the banks by shoveling up and tamping it. The banks were about 20, 30 feet high when I went to work there. We kept building up the sides. Then, when it all dried off, they would haul it away and have it processed in the smelter.

*Was that done around Virginia City, or would they haul it somewhere else?*

They'd haul it away. The real good stuff from the mill, the real good tailings, were called concentrates. They were put on big, semicircular tanks or troughs with a fire underneath them. That would dry them out. That, in turn, would be ground up again into powder or dust and put into sacks and shipped to the smelters. I used to have to help stoke the fires. I'd carry these logs and throw them under the big ovens. We would wheel the wheelbarrows—they're constructed to look like tanks, not little wheelbarrows like gardeners have—and we poured the mud into the semicircular troughs where it would be dried out, scraped it up again and put it in a regular barrel. It was then run through what we called the coffee grinder—a miniature grinding mill—and it would come out as dust.

I can remember one time when I was getting a wheelbarrow of this to put into a sack for the shipment to the smelter, the dust was blinding when I came down, and I was choking. I hit a knothole and tipped the barrel over. A couple of thousand dollars worth of gold dust shot all over the floor. The other guys I was working with...we all rushed over, swept it up as fast as we could and put it back in the wheelbarrow or into the sacks. Just as we finished, the superintendent came to work, as we worked on the graveyard shift. "Well," he said, "boys, you're sweeping up, I see."

We said, "Yes, Mr. McFarland, we like a nice, clean place to work."

He says, "Keep up the good work."

I had also worked various jobs around that mill, including one at what we called the grizzly. [A grizzly is a device to keep oversized rocks out of the rock crusher. It is usually set at the head of the crusher, at an angle so that all oversized material will roll off.—Ed.] They hauled the dirt in trucks from a huge hole, a huge excavation, which can still be seen across the street from the Fourth Ward School. It's called the Loring Cut after one of the owners. The trucks would haul that down and dump it off onto a grating made of railroad rails. The man who worked on that in the grizzly had to make little rocks out of big rocks. With a 12-pound sledgehammer he would whack the rocks and break them up. They'd fall through the grating and then into the rock crusher. That was quite a strenuous job.

I was in good shape. I was going to college, and I worked all summer up there in that. Jobs were very scarce, I'll tell you that, and I was glad to get it. Four dollars a day, eight-hour shift, no days off. I started at graveyard, which is 11:30 at night, and worked all night there. I also worked for the highway department out in the desert by Yerington.

*I find it very interesting your saying how scarce jobs were on the Comstock during the 1930s, because statistics seem to indicate that mining was picking up during the thirties, particularly after 1933, 1934.*

They would revive skeleton crews here and there. The biggest operation was the Loring pit—that huge open pit across from the Fourth Ward School. They dug that out with steam shovels and trucks, which, incidentally, sometimes uncovered or intersected tunnels from the old mines in the old days. Then they built that mill where I worked, down at the entrance to the old Norcross mine, and a tunnel where the Hale & Norcross had been. This was this big mountain way up above the mountain; they had open pit mining. And the trucks would haul the ore down and dump it in the mill. It'd be processed in that Arizona-Comstock mill—we always called it the Norcross no matter what names they put on it.

One summer I worked at tearing down the famous Crown Point trestle. On either side of the canyon were the remnants of a couple of great mines—the Yellow Jacket and the Crown Point. (Incidentally, the land between them at the bottom of the canyon was where Sandy Bowers, who built Bowers Mansion, had one of the earliest mines. His wife was Eilley Orrum, the mystic person who used to predict a lot of things.) Spanning that canyon was this giant trestle. Pictures of it are still around. It was about 90 feet high at the deepest part, and it supported the V & T. The Virginia-Truckee trains would come across it. Sometimes as many as 40 trains a day ran up and down there carrying ore, passengers and freight.

In 1936, I believe it was, there was some renewed mining activity in the Crown Point. They would blast, and big clouds of blasting

smoke and dust would go under the trestle. The trestle began to wobble a bit. So the mining people made a deal with the V & they would tear down the trestle and move the track up the canyon a ways across a fill, which was not quite as spectacular a view, but it was effective. The V & T wanted to preserve as much of the wood and the ironwork on the bridge for resale, so I worked with the V & T crew and helped tear it down. I got pretty good pay for those days, because I could work at heights.

I pretty near fell off one time; I lost my interest in heights then. Some of the section hands working there were carrying out some of the big timbers. I stood beside them to let them get by, and they accidentally bumped me. I just maneuvered my sledgehammer, kept my balance and finally worked my way back to an upright position. Otherwise, I would have gone down to Sandy Bowers's mine, I guess.

It was a spectacular job. We lowered these great big sections of the trestle by rope so that nothing was smashed. I still have some souvenirs. The bolts that anchored the wood together were huge. They were over two to three feet long and more than an inch or two thick. The washers were as big as salad plates. The nuts were bigger than a man's fist—that's how thick they were. Everything was on a huge, mammoth scale. That was built on the 1870s. Now it's all gone. There's nothing left there. The recent Houston Oil Company, Mining Company activities have torn up all that area there. I have some pictures left. They were published in Stan Paher's Nevada centennial book that came out. [Stanley W. Paher, ed., Nevada: Official Bicentennial Book (Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1976).—Ed.]

*How long did it take you to tear the trestle down?*

About two or three months. We did it very carefully. My job and another fellow's job was what we called drift. It's hard to explain, but you hold one bolt against another and hit it, and it'll force it out. See, over almost a century or three quarters of a century, the wood had tightened so tight around the bolts that they were impossible to move out by ordinary wrenches or pulleys, so we had to hammer them out. We would call that drifting them out. It's something like they liked to do in the mines, before they had the pneumatic or big electric drills. Miners used to hammer a chisel or a big bolt into the wall of the mine and pound a hole in with a little hammer—an eight-pounder. Then they put the dynamite sticks into those holes for blasting. So it was similar to that. One of us would hold another bolt, and then the other fellow would hit it with a sledgehammer. I still have scars where my companion hit me a few times. We had to trust each other pretty good. Then you get nervous and whack them a little more, but we did get paid better than the other fellows did, because we worked up high.

We got to be pretty strong and nimble with those sledgehammers. They're bigger than what miners use. They have these contests—double jack and single jack. A double jack is a big sledgehammer—full length. A single jack is a small one held in one hand. The miners still have those contests. A descendant of one of the old families up there, Fred Andreasen, is still the state champion.

*Did they have those kinds of contests as amusement when you were growing up in Virginia City?*

Yes. Like for the Labor Day celebration, they'd have a purse, and men would come in from Bishop, Eureka and other places and compete in that. It was very colorful, and

they still do it. It's a great tradition. I'm glad they maintain it, and I wish they'd do it at the state fair.

I did a few odd stints in the mines. We did what we called rustlin—we would either walk down to Silver City or hitch a ride with anybody coming down, and then walk back up to Virginia City, going from mine to mine up through Gold Canyon to see if they had anything in the way of work. I did get on a little while at a mine called the Justice, which is at the lower part of Gold Hill, almost to Silver City. I put in a little time underground there.

By coincidence, the Justice was the only cold mine that I ever heard of up there. It was very dry and very cold underground. Most of them were hot, steamy and moist. There's nothing left of the Justice now except maybe remnants of the gallows frame. Little rocks kept falling on your head...tinkle along. They didn't have hardhats then that everybody wears now in mining construction.

*What did you do when you worked underground there?*

Oh, shoveling—we called it mucking—ore or waste dirt into a mine car and pushing it—they call it tramming—to the hoist, the cage. I wasn't very skillful at it, but they only had a small crew down there. I didn't get much time underground, which was all right with me.

*How much did they pay you for that?*

I think it was \$4 a day. Then I worked in the mill, I got \$4 a day and no days off. We'd work different shifts. It'd be about two weeks on the graveyard shift from 11:30 at night until morning. Then the day shift would come on. Then what they called the night

shift would come on about 5:30 until 11:30. Pay wasn't too good. Actually, in the old days, the miners got better pay. But back in the days of Mackay and his partners it was \$5 a day.

The workers had a very strong Miners' Union. The mine owners never had labor trouble with the union, but the union got miners good working conditions and good pay. The conditions were some of the best in the county.

*Were the unions active in the 1920s and 1930s?*

No. They had petered out during the twenties and the Depression, I think...in fact, around the turn of the century. But the Miners' Union had a nice building on B Street not far from the opera house, and they had a good public library in there. It was a convenient place for people to visit. I don't know if the Miners' Union building is still standing. I think it might be. It was a nice little place there. The name miners' union was pretty common. They had a butcher shop called Miners' Union Butcher Shop.

*After your experiences working in the mill and the mines, what did you plan to be when you grew up?*

The newspaper fascinated me, when I had one little taste of it in high school with the Virginia City News, the little weekly paper there. The editor was a man named Vincent Nevin. His father was the postmaster when I was a child. Mr. Nevin was a veteran of World War I, and he had some problems dealing with combat service. He put out that paper with hand-set type and a press that...I don't know if it was hand operated or electrically operated, but it was very old and primitive. My first published stories were in his paper.



During the Depression the school had dropped everything but basketball, so we had our own baseball and football teams, which we coached ourselves and played games. And we asked Mr. Nevin to put in a little story about a game we were going to have. He said, "Well, I will if you write it up and then cover it for me." So I gave him a couple of paragraphs about the outcome of our game, and he asked me if I would start writing a weekly column about the high school news, which I did. Those were my first published stories.

I once got some special instruction in journalism from a prison inmate. My uncle, Will Harris, was the assistant warden at the Nevada State Prison, and his assistant, Jack Meredith, was a trusty, and they talked about me. I don't know his [Meredith's] background, but he was editor of the prison magazine, which was a slick paper magazine—a very good one—called the Rainbow. So several times I went by there, and I was impressed by him. He was a very smooth, personable person.

The Rainbow magazine contained well-written stories about different sections of the prison and their sports. It was very interesting. They published my first real story outside of the local newspaper. I wrote a story on the life of Dan De Quille—Mark Twain's friend on the Enterprise. They published that in full around 1936 or 1937 and gave it quite a play.

Later on this man who was the magazine's editor escaped [chuckles] and led a fantastic cruise across the country signing my uncle's name to all kinds of vouchers. He would go to a big factory or something and represent himself as W. S. Harris; he could imitate the handwriting. He bought cell blocks, hundreds of shoes, football suits and many other things for the prison. Every place he went they were anxious to get his trade, so they would give him an advance. He didn't have to run out

of cash, so they would give him advances. They finally captured him in New Jersey, I think. That ended my personal instruction in journalism. But I had entered the University of Nevada then.

*Did you always expect to go to the university and study?*

I had hoped to. I'm still very grateful to my father and his reliable salary as a bus driver. He worked long hours and pretty strenuously. I worked part-time whenever I could. I was campus correspondent for the Reno Gazette in my last years. I got \$20 a month. We would do odd jobs around Reno—work for the power company, clean the ice out of the flumes and stuff like that. And our summer work...I struggled through, although salaries were meager, but the prices were low. When I went to the university, I stayed at the most expensive fraternity—a few dollars a month more than the other ones—and I paid room, board and dues for \$37 a month. [laughter]

*When you left Virginia City to go to college, did you intend to return?*

I didn't know what was ahead. I returned almost every weekend, because my father and I were sort of the correspondents for the Reno Gazette. In those days the Gazette was the largest paper in the state. They built themselves up by huge columns of personal items from country correspondents—Virginia City, Carson, Genoa, Fallon—big, long strings of newsy notes from Yerington or so on, the comings and goings of people and accidents and any kind of news. They built a real big circulation on the basis of these. And they paid pretty well—I don't know whether it was 10 cents or 20 cents a published inch. That

helped me through college. I would go home weekends and write up the stuff my father and mother had gathered during the week. That helped me get through college.

Early in my career on the newspaper, I had to go up to Virginia City to cover a major fire. Even though there was a firehouse there at the time, this fire in 1942 destroyed about 30 homes on a ridge called the Divide between Gold Hill and Virginia City. It's never been the same. There were a few scattered buildings left there, including the old firehouse. They rescued the hand-drawn carts out of there, which are now preserved in the Firemen's Museum up there.

I remember going up there that night with some photographer from our paper. I went to my home. My father had evacuated some of his neighbors in his bus and took them out on the Geiger Grade. I went in and was phoning an account of the fire when a big billow of smoke burst right into the house; the wind was terribly strong. I thought, "Uh-oh," so I signed off. [laughter] Luckily, the wind suddenly shifted, and the fire went back on itself and burned out before it could hit the main part of the city.

#### **THE EMERGENCE OF TOURISM IN VIRGINIA CITY, 1930S-1980S**

*Although you were only in high school, did you notice any effect on Virginia City when gambling was relegalized in 1931 and the divorce residency period was dropped?*

No. A few of the saloons had card games, but not with a house dealer. Guys would just sit down and play poker or those kinds of games. They didn't have much of that; it wasn't until more recently that they've had more gambling clubs. Of course, there were slot machines at an early stage, but not like

Reno with casino gambling. There was very little effect up there, I'm sure.

*Did people have feelings about the law one way or the other?*

I don't think so. Not up there. If I recall right, they had those card games going long before it was legalized. But it wasn't the kind of gambling that the house would have their own dealers there and the games set up. It was just a place where guys would come, play cards at night and maybe have a few drinks.

*But that was during Prohibition.*

[laughter] Everybody had a sort of secret way of learning when the "Prohis" were coming. Those were the Prohibition agents. They would quickly eradicate traces of their bars—hide the booze and just have soft drinks [laughter] like all places.

*Even though I've read that by the 1920s or so, the red light district had vanished from Virginia City, people have told me otherwise. Were there still houses around even in the 1950s?*

I think they have been up for a long time. There was a big section in the real old days on D Street between Union and I think Sutton Avenue. There are remnants of these houses. There were about two houses, anyway, all the time. But that was all they had left of it. I guess at one time the whole street there for about two blocks was a solid...but most of those little houses had gone by the time I was in school. I think there were still two there. We weren't allowed to go near them. [laughter] But I think there were two almost continuously, or at least one old gal for years and decades probably!

*Did you know Lucius Beebe?*

Yes, but not very well, because I moved away. I just met him casually off and on. During journalistic affairs I would run into him. My father didn't care much for him, but they tolerated him! [laughter] He was quite a dude, and the old-timers were resentful of him—I don't know why. He did help to stimulate the tourist trade with his colorful Territorial Enterprise.

I think Charles H. Clegg was Beebe's collaborator; they lived in the same house. Clegg was a photographer. They put out a lot of railroad books and illustrated many of them with Clegg's photos of the old trains. They got really interested in the V & T Railroad, and they put out a complete and very good book on the V & T Railroad. Clegg, after Beebe's death, put out a book called The Best of Beebe. He collected Beebe's columns and.... Clegg has since died, too. He moved to California and died down there.

*Why did they go to Virginia City in the first place?*

I'm not quite sure, but I think because of Beebe's interest in railroads. He wrote several good studies of the Twentieth Century Limited and all those big trains. He was really a train buff; he knew a lot about locomotives. And he wrote his books while he was up there.

Then Beebe got the idea of reviving the Territorial Enterprise. [Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg purchased the defunct Virginia City News in 1951 and revived the old Territorial Enterprise by renaming their paper the Territorial Enterprise and Virginia City News in 1952. Beebe sold the newspaper in 1960.—Ed.] He put it out—it was very colorful the way he did it. He was a little lenient on the truth of things, but it made him very colorful. The typography of his paper was interesting. He had some old-time type that he ran across

somewhere. They used that for their headlines and for advertising illustrations.

Lucius Beebe was quite a picturesque character himself. He affected what they call broadcloth coats—these long-tailed swallowtail...not swallowtail, but gentlemen's coats, fancy vests, big, broad-brimmed hats. So, as I said, some of the old-timers thought he was pretty snooty and snobby, but he did do a lot of good in stimulating national interest in Virginia City. People that took over the Enterprise off and on in the years since have never matched him, although they tried hard. They press too hard on the Mark Twain stuff which has been used over and over again. Local people say they're tired of being Mark Twained to death! [laughter]

*When did Virginia City start becoming a tourist destination?*

In the late 1930s...yes, around the mid-thirties they started coming in. There's a man named Paul Smith, a chubby little fellow that got a little store that would sell curios and souvenirs. It's now where the Bucket of Blood is. I forget the name of his little place, but he would really hustle and get out. He put flyers on cars, and people started coming up. He would do that in Los Angeles. They regard him as the first real tourist stimulator. And then, of course, Lucius Beebe started up nationwide. I think the "Bonanza" TV series did some help to it, too. Can you remember the Cartwrights and their mythical ranch, which was supposed to be right next to Virginia city? [laughter] They helped. I know a lot of people used to come up and ask the Virginia City people where the Ponderosa Ranch was. It got so they would direct them down the Six-Mile Canyon [laughs] where they would wind up out in the desert by the Carson River—couldn't find the Ponderosa!



Some of the real locals—the older ones who'd been in Virginia City a long time—resent some of these new people in the businesses up there. They don't like their lack of knowledge, the fantastic stories they tell with great authority or a sign on a store saying Established 1867, when it was only built two or three years ago. They resent those things, but it's always that way between the home guards and the Johnny-come-latelies. [laughter]



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EDWARD S. COLLETTI**REMINISCENCES OF LIFE IN VIRGINIA CITY,  
1920S-1950S**

Edward Colletti: My father, Joseph Domenic Colletti, was born in Turin, Italy, in 1874. He came to this country in 1887 or 1888. There was six brothers all come over about the same time. They had an uncle in Casper, Wyoming. I guess it's coal they mine in Casper. They all come over to go to work at the coal mine.

Then my dad came into Nevada in about 1900 to Virginia City. He was just a kid then; I guess he was the youngest of the six. He stayed here in Virginia City until he died in 1940.

He came to Virginia City to go to work in the mines. He worked in the Yellow Jacket, Crown Point, the Union and Consolidated Virginia. He always told us the Yellow Jacket in Gold Hill was the hottest and the richest mine he ever worked in. It was hot down there. And he got better wages in there...I think he was making \$5 a day then, but most of the mines were paying \$4, \$4.50.

My dad worked in the Yellow Jacket mine until he lost an eye about 1910. They were drilling, and a piece of the drill chipped off, bounced up and put his eye out. Then he didn't work for, oh, three or four years, and then he went back to work over around the mills doing work in refining the ore. After that he retired in about 1925 or 1926. He had a little pension coming in from losing his eye. Then he did a little work around prospecting in Virginia City and different mines around and making shipments. He was pretty good at spotting the ore. He might have done a little high grading between! [laughter] That's taking a little off the top, like most of the miners used to do. They knew a high-grade streak, and they'd pocket some of the high grade. Then they'd take it to somebody that'd buy it, who would know it and give them about half of what it was worth. Then they'd sell it to the mint.

*Kathryn Totton: What kind of work did your father do in the mines?*

Well, the miners did all the work—he'd drill, put in the rounds, did blasting, used a hand muck to muck it out, put timber in, lay the rail for the cars.

*It wasn't particularly specialized?*

No, they did everything.

*How did the family get along during those years that he was laid off after he lost his eye?*

Well, the state industrial commission was paying Dad support. They paid out a little bit on it, you know. Then he'd saved a little bit.

*Did your father belong to the union all those years he was mining?*

No, he didn't. I don't think there was a union around here at that time. There might have been one, but most of the miners up here didn't belong to it. There was a Miners' Union in the early days, but he didn't belong to it...not that I can remember. He was a life member of the Odd Fellows Lodge, though. They used to have Christmas parties.... They still have a lodge here, but I think there's only a few members left in it. They still have the building down there.

*What about your mother? Where was she born?*

She was born in Turin, Italy—same town. Her name was Marguerita Vivenza. She and my dad come over about... well, after he got settled here he sent for her, and she came over. Both of them had big ranches over there in Italy. They come here just before World War I, and the government took the ranches away from them over there at about the time World War I started. So they got paid off and then came over. The ranch my dad farmed

was over 600 acres. They built a big airport there during World War I—one of the main airports in Turin, after the government took it over.

*After your father was settled in Nevada, when he sent for your mother, did she come directly to Virginia City?*

Right to Virginia City, yes. They had a guy here by the name of Charlie Noce; he had a big store and more or less a hotel out the north end, and he helped a lot of people settle down here in Virginia City. He sold all the groceries to them—they were all working—so he made himself a little bit of money, too. He would rent them a room or rent them a little shack or some kind.

*Did Charlie Noce have anything to do with encouraging people to come from Italy?*

I think he may have. But my dad was here already. I guess that's probably one of the reasons why they all come over, and they all settled in Wyoming...Colorado. My dad and one of his brothers were the only two out of the six that come to Virginia City.

*Is the building that Charlie Noce had still standing?*

No. It's nothing but a big lot there now. There's a little odd-looking house out there as you go out of town on the left-hand side that they're fixing up now—that used to be where Charlie Noce lived.

*Did you know him?*

No, I didn't.

*Did your mother speak English when she came?*

Oh, yes, she did. She spoke pretty good. I remember when we all were going to school—her and a couple of other Italian women used to go to school with us, and she'd pick it up just like that. She learned a lot about the English language from dropping in to school once in a while, just to see how we were doing! [laughter] More or less she could speak it and understand it.

Mothers used to visit school more often than they do now, I guess. I don't think I've been...when my boy went to school I think I probably went to school about three or four times all the time he was going through school.

*Well, you didn't need to learn English, though! What did your mother do? Did she work outside the home at all?*

No, no. She raised six kids—six of us. That kept her pretty busy. Then when we all grew up she relaxed and had fun. She'd take trips around. She'd go to San Francisco, around there. . . just travel around. A couple of the other women who were free like her after they'd raised their families, they'd get together and have parties and do a little traveling.

*When were you born?*

Nineteen seventeen. I was born in Virginia City at St. Mary's Hospital right down here.

*A lot of people I've talked to were born right at home.*

Yes. Well, my other two brothers were born at home. At the time I was born, I guess my mother was kind of sick, so she had to go in the hospital. [F. W.] Hodgins was the doctor. He put her in the hospital a couple days before I was born just to keep an eye

on her. Then Bill Marks's aunt, Mrs. Hattie Bradshaw, was at the hospital at the time, and she was more or less the midwife.

*And you had four brothers?*

Yes, four brothers and one sister. I was the fourth. There was two younger brothers—a brother and a sister, another brother, and I was the fourth.

There's still four of us alive—three boys and the girl. I got a brother in Hawthorne, Nevada, a brother in Reno and my sister in San Francisco. They didn't go too far. And we were all together here; we had more or less of a reunion about three weeks ago, when they had the high school reunion up here. They were all here. My brother in Reno. . . we see each other quite often, and my brother in Hawthorne comes in quite often. Well, they're all retired now—sitting around doing nothing, relaxing.

*Why didn't they stay in Virginia City?*

Oh, I don't know. Just had to get out and do something different. My brother in Reno [Michael Colletti] worked quite a few years at the highway department; he was a division engineer for 32 years. When he settled down, he bought a home in Reno because that's where his headquarters were—down at the Coney Island Restaurant. He bought a home down in Reno 30 years ago, and he decided to stay there, and he went to school down there.

*Where was your family home in Virginia City?*

It was up on A Street out on the north end, between Mill and Sutton streets. There's a big glory hole there now and one house left alongside of it—the Berrys live in it now. All there is now is an entrance to a big open pit. A lot of gold and silver came out of the open pit

that is left up there now. They took out maybe \$400,000 or \$500,000 up in there, when the pit started in 1942.

*Did your family home have electricity?*

Oh, yes. It didn't have, I guess, when my folks first moved in, but they had it put in. In fact, one of my brothers rewired the house when he was still in high school; he rewired the whole thing. He was a good electrician, a good mechanic.

And we had hot and cold water. The hot water was in the stove in the kitchen; it was heated by coils in the stove. That's the only way they used to get their hot water. Some of those stoves had built-in hot water tables, you know—sections of the stove where you put the fire box right alongside...get a little hot water that way. We had the regular big hot water tank, which was connected with the stove here to use the heat.

*There did the water come from?*

From the regular flume line that comes in here. We had regular pipelines down there. We get the same water that we had years and years ago—same flume line and everything—from Marlette Lake.

*Yes. But now you have water year-round. I've heard that it used to be you didn't have water in the winter.*

Some winters we'd have it...well, the flumes'd all freeze up; a pipeline would burst or something. Yes, a lot of times we used to go up there—all us kids in high school, you know—nothing to do—and we'd have to go up on the pipeline and flume line and muck out the flumes. We'd take all that ice and stuff out to get the water coming in. There's been

times it was two and three months before the water could run. An early freeze would come along about December, and then sometimes you wouldn't get that water running until the middle of March!

*That did you do in the meantime?*

Oh, we hauled water in. And we'd use it very sparingly. A lot of people would go to Carson or Reno, somewhere, to one of those swimming pools like Carson Hot Springs and go swimming. Then they'd wash their clothes out at the laundry. In the early days they never had a lot of hot water in the house or.. .most of them had outhouses back in the early days. Of course, we used a lot of perfumes and stuff. [laughter]

*Did your parents speak Italian at home when you were growing up?*

Oh, yes. Yes, they did. I could speak Italian until I got about in the eighth grade, and then I forgot all about.... Well, I could understand it and speak a little bit, but not like I should have. My mother learned to speak English fairly good, and she would always talk to us in English instead of Italian, you know? So we just got away from it.

*Were there many other Italian families in Virginia City?*

Oh, there was a lot of them. I'd say about a fourth of the population were Italian. In September or October all the Italians got to making wine. They'd have about five big carloads of grapes come in, and all the Italian families would buy two or three tons of grapes. Everybody was making wine! Yes, they'd have three or four boxcars of grapes come in. They would make wine in the cellars of their houses.

The Rossos, Antunoviches, Gavazzis—all of them—used to make wine. Ito [Italo] Gavazzi's dad lived here for years, and he used to make a lot of wine. Martin Rosso's dad, Paul Giraudo... all of them made wine. You could make a couple hundred gallons of wine at that time. But they didn't stop at a couple hundred; they'd go for 500 or 600. They'd have a wine party once in a while—get a bunch of guys together and have salami and cheese and French bread and drink that wine like it was going out of style. [laughter]

*There did they get the grapes?*

They imported them from, I guess, Napa Valley. That's when the railroad [Virginia and Truckee] used to come in through here. They'd get the carloads of grapes on the railroad.

*How did they go about making the wine?*

Well, they'd crush them up. My dad used to wear those rubber boots; he'd say, "I'm a mixer." But then all the kids in the neighborhood would like to come over and put on those boots and crush that wine! That's a fact! [laughter] That used to be fun—eating grapes and smashing the grapes for wine.

*How long did that wine making go on?*

Up until about six or seven years ago they used to make wine. A lot of those old-timers are gone now. They all passed away. And the kids don't mess around with it. I doubt if there's anybody now making wine.

*Was the wine any good?*

Oh, it was good stuff...oh, yes! It was good. Once in a while my dad let a gallon go. If a real

good friend would come in from Carson City or Reno, he'd always give them a gallon. But we drank most of it. Well, he didn't want us to. . . he had a barrel there that he watered down half and half—half wine and half water. That was the stuff that we were supposed to drink. But we used to get in the real good stuff, too.

*Did you have it with meals?*

Oh, yes, any time. We used to get a gallon or two, hide it out and bring it over to the North End Gang's cabin. All the kids in the north end would have a nip or two of that wine.. .you know, sit there and play cards. We used to play poker, bridge, pedro and pinochle. We used to have a lot of fun playing cards.

*Did your folks belong to Italian social organizations? Were there things like that in Virginia City?*

No, there wasn't. My mother used to go to church a lot. In fact, she made us all go to church. My dad never went to church. He didn't care whether we went to church or not. But my mother was the one that was making sure that we went to church. All of us had to go through the altar; we were all altar boys. I hated that! Get all dressed up to go to church. I could hardly wait to get home to take all our Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes off and get out and tear into things again!

*Who were the priests here when you were growing up?*

Father Phil O'Riley was one. Father O'Riley was the best. Before him it was Father Daniel Murphy. Father Murphy's the one that used to clobber us all every now and then. We were altar boys, and when we did something



wrong, boy, he'd come down and cuff us. But old Father O'Riley, he'd say, "Boys, boys, take it easy." He was a goodhearted soul. It'd be raining and snowing, and he'd say, "Lovely day." [laughter] Murphy was here for about maybe 15, 16 years. O'Riley was here probably that long, too. That's the only two I knew while I was up here. But then there's been a lot of them since then.

*Were they involved in the community?*

Well, yes, and just like they are now, because they have church functions and stuff like that.

*What about charity activities?*

They used to have card parties and stuff like that—raffles and bingo games. That's about all. The Odd Fellows and the Rebekahs used to have parties, too...social events.

When we were kids we used to stay in the north end, more or less. There were the North End Gang and the South End Gang, and when a couple of us would stray into the South End Gang, the South End boys would put the run on us. So we stayed out at the north end mostly.

We built ourselves a couple of cabins out there. We used to have parties in the cabins, go sleigh riding down the Six-Mile Canyon, and just generally have fun... snowballing each other and having parties. We had a pond up in Byrne's Ravine—dug out a little pond there—and we got the water from the flume that went out past up above the pond. We'd drill a hole in the wooden flume to get some water down in the pond. The water used to run out the end of town and way down...they let it run loose anyway, so we might as well have a little bit down for our pond. And most of us kids, at that time, learned to swim up

there. We used to have fun swimming in the summertime.

*Were you the North End Gang just because you all happened to live on that part of town?*

We lived on the north end, yes. We wouldn't dare go past the dividing line. Then it became the south end up to Divide. I guess Gold Hill had their own [gang].

Us kids used to climb around on those hills a lot of times in the summertime—go down the canyon or up on top of Mount Davidson, wander around in the hills quite a bit. We would hardly ever come into town, downtown, up the main street, until later on when we got to be in high school—13, 14 years old, I think. But outside of that we were always doing something out off the main street. We got by, and we had our own fun.

Well, once in a while we'd take a run into Reno. A guy up there by the name of Al Evans—Evans brothers—had an old Chase car. We'd pile about 10 or 12 of us kids on it and take a trip into Reno to see a show or something. Had to push it halfway back up Geiger Grade or go down the Carson River. It was all right going down, but on the way back, we'd all have to get out and walk up the hill.

As kids, we always had a little money. Most of us did little odds and ends. We'd go rake somebody's yard, mow a lawn or sell bottles to the bootleggers.

*There were a few of those around?*

Oh, yes, there was quite a few. Well, during Prohibition, you know, all these places were open, but they weren't selling soda water. Every now and then they'd come in and they'd get a shot of whiskey or beer. The "Prohis" [Prohibition officers] used to come up, check the town out, but the guy that was the head of



the deal was born and raised in Virginia City, and when he'd come into town he'd always call the sheriff and say, well, he had to make a visit, and the sheriff would go around and notify everybody...lay low. [laughter] That was Benny James; he was the sheriff here for years. He was born and raised here, too. He had a saloon before he went in to be sheriff. A regular guy.

*Which places were open then?*

Oh, a lot of places were open—the Crystal Bar, the Delta, Pastime Club, Sawdust Corner, Bucket of Blood, Union Brewery, Virginia Hotel, Silver Queen—well, they called it “The Cap” instead of the Silver Queen [because it used to be called the Capitol Saloon]—Virginia Club, and a few more. It was quite a few. They had a lot of good drinkers in this town. A lot of those miners used to love to get into a bar and have a little nip now and then. [laughter] They still do, but there's no miners here. All the people that worked for the county or around to.... odds and ends, they always slipped in and had a beer or two.

In the 1920s I imagine there must have been maybe 5,000 or 6,000 people living in Virginia City...easy that. Yes, the town has changed quite a bit.

Have you ever seen any pictures of Chinatown in Virginia City? That was quite a spot down there. This was when we were kids back in the 1920s, or before that. I can remember there must have been a couple of hundred Chinamen living there. They had regular stores and everything down there.

They had three or four Chinese laundries—one up alongside the courthouse on B Street, two or three on the north end of town out there where the old assay office is now, and another one out there just the other side of Sutton Avenue. There used to be quite a few

Chinamen. Up on B Street they had a big three-story building where a lot of Chinese were living. They used to work around town here. A lot of them worked in gardening, and a lot of them worked.... Where the Delta gift shop is, that used to be a Chinese restaurant, and there was a Chinese restaurant alongside of the Bucket of Blood. There was another Chinese restaurant down at the Silver Queen—one on each side of the Silver Queen there. They had five or six Chinese restaurants.

They had a big Chinese store underneath where Julia Bulette's Saloon is now. And a big dry goods store and general store down there on D Street called Chung Kee's. Charlie Sam... he had a business. Wally Chinghi had the Owl Cafe over there, alongside the Bucket of Blood, where the extension of the Bucket of Blood is now.

Yes, there was quite a few Chinamen here. They had a regular Chinese church. They used to leave it open, and some of us kids used to go in there and steal the firecrackers and steal the candy—Chinese candy they used to put on the altar. They had the figurines in there. They had a regular, beautiful Chinese church. Then they locked it up.

Finally the Chinamen all disappeared. A lot of the old ones went back to China for some reason or another—back to China to die, I guess. Then that town just fell apart. But as far as kids...I only remember about four or five young Chinese kids that grew up around here when we were kids—not more than four or five at the most.

*Did you associate with the Chinese kids at all?*

Oh, yes, sure. Went to school with them. In fact, I saw this Raymond Chinghi here last year. He's a dentist down out of Fresno. He went to school here.

There was a few Indian kids going to school here, too. In fact, they had two or three different Indian camps in town when we were kids—one down by the Six-Mile Canyon across the street from the old brewery down there, and one right over here where you turn down that truck route.

I think I graduated with a couple of Indian kids from the First Ward School—an Indian girl and an Indian boy. The first three grades went to the First Ward School, which was the old school that was out here, out by the freight station. Then after the third grade we all went to fourth grade at the Fourth Ward. I think they discontinued the First Ward School out there in about 1927 or 1928, I guess. maybe a little bit later than that.

*Did the Indian boy and girl go on to the Fourth Ward School with you?*

Oh, yes. Yes, one of them graduated, but the girl left, I guess, when she was in about the seventh grade. A lot of them took off about that time.

The girl's name was June Cooper, and the boy's name was Edmund Jack. He had another brother by the name of Raymond Jack. Then there was Raymond David. There were only four that I can remember now.

*Do you know to what tribe they belonged?*

I guess they must have been Paiutes. - .Washo or Paiutes. They were here quite awhile.

*What did their parents do?*

They more or less did a lot of the laundry around here or housework—cleaned—when I was a kid. They'd go from place to place to do a little housework. That's about it.

*Do you have any idea what became of their parents?*

Well, they, as I remember, died right here around town. And the children grew up and left...went to the Indian school. I guess if their mother and father died or something, they'd go down to Stewart Indian School. I don't know what happened after that. I guess they were pretty much out on their own.

My first job out of high school was for Zeb Kendall, who was president of the Con. Virginia mine. [Zeb Kendall bought the Con. Virginia mine in 1919.—Ed.] I worked in a little mill which the Con. Virginia had built down by the open pit where our house on A Street used to be. Zeb Kendall milled a lot of property up there.

Zeb Kendall was quite a character. He loved to gamble. He wasn't much of a drinking man, but he sure loved to gamble. He'd stay up night and day to gamble. When we had the Delta Saloon after World War II, he used to come down and sit around there, and with anybody who would come in he'd play pinochle, cribbage, poker. He'd gamble at anything. He was getting pretty well crippled up, getting pretty old then. All his kids were gone, and his wife..., she took pretty good care of him. She'd come down and pick him up whenever he'd want to come home—bring him downtown and pick him up whenever he was ready to go home. Sometimes it'd be two or three days later, but he'd sit there and play.

Yes, I guess he went through a few million dollars in his life—made it, lost it, made it, lost it. He lost it mostly in the Con. Virginia mine down there. He sold a lot of stock, and he built it up; then he'd do a little more work and lose that. Then he'd go back and raise some more money. He had a lot of friends in...spent a lot of time around San Francisco. I guess that's

where he picked up a lot of his loot...put it into the mine.

*He hired local people to work there?*

Yes, he'd give jobs to everybody that he knew around here. In fact, when I got out of high school and he had the mill going there, first thing he did was give me a job, put me to work. We were almost neighbors—we lived about a block apart. Yes, I worked for him around the mill for about three years.

They had a mill that was extracting the gold and silver from the ore. The trucks'd come in loaded with rock, and they'd dump it on a flat plate—what they called a grizzly [a device to keep oversized rocks out of the crusher—Ed.]. Then the rocks would go down to another bin, and from that bin they'd go into a crushing plant, then into another bin that would feed the mill. They'd run the ore through a crusher, and then they'd run it through a ball mill. Then the fines'd go through these tanks— they'd put cyanide in them, and the gold would all settle to the bottom. The cyanide was in layers, and they'd empty out a tank and scrape the layers. Then they'd retort it, get the gold and silver in the bars and send it to the mint.

*And as a kid just out of high school, what exactly did you do in that process?*

Well, I'd run the crusher—grind it up, you know. And when the ore would go through the ball mill, I used to feed the water to it. It was automatic. After you once get it set, it would just grind out and go through these tanks, settle in the tanks, and go through the float cells, and that was it. So much water and so much feed—so much dirt—went into it to have a regular mixture. After you once get that set, then as long as the water was still running

and the dirt was going in there, it would just keep going. Once in a while you might have to reset it a little ways, add a little lime or a little cyanide to it. That was just routine. So all you had to do was stand there and make sure that the rocks would go right into the crusher and it wouldn't hang up and stuff like that.

*What did you have to do if the rocks did hang up?*

Well, you'd set the crusher off and then have to dig them out and pry them out. It wasn't bad.

*How long did you work at that?*

Oh, I worked there...I worked around two or three different mills up until about 1941, 1942. Then I went to San Francisco. I went into the navy in 1943. When I got out of the navy, I come back here, and John Zalac and I opened up the Delta Saloon. We run that up until 1959. Him and I went to school together. And Joe Viani owned the place and then Dominic Petrini. And they gave us a lease on it. We were in there 14 years.

Then I run for J.P. [Justice of the Peace], and I was in the J.P. office for 24 years. So now I'm just sitting back spending my money.., having fun! [laughter]

*What made you decide to lease the Delta and go into that line of work?*

Oh, I don't know. There was nothing else to do. They come and asked us it.. .because I used to hang out in there once in a while before the war, you know. When the war come along, it shut down. John and I knew the guys pretty well. We knew Joe Viani and Dominic Petrini real good. We used to run around and

do favors for them when they were in the bar and once in a while even work for them. So we decided to go in there. Got a good business going, did real good.

Then when Angelo Petrini [Dominic's son] was old enough to go into the bar business—he had to do something—and our lease had expired, he took it over. I worked for him for one year, and then I filed for J.P. and happened to get the job, and I just kept it up. It was good experience working in a bar. You get to know everybody that comes around. When a stranger walks in, you can almost tell by the way he acts what he's going to do, even before he sits down at the bar. You get to know people. It was good education. I had a lot of fun, too. Did a lot of drinking, of course—maybe too much at times. You would sample that merchandise to know what you're selling.

*What was the Delta like when you took it over?*

Oh, it wasn't dolled up like it is now. It was just more or less a home bar, and about the same amount of people would come in every day—the same patrons that come along. And we built it up where we had a few people coming up from Carson and Reno just, you know, to say hello once in a while.

*But it was mostly local people at that time coming in?*

Yes. And there was only...well, there was about 10 or 12 bars open then. And everybody knew Johnny Zalac and me.

## JOHN A. ZALAC

**MEMORIES OF FAMILY AND LIFE IN  
VIRGINIA CITY, 1920S**

John Zalac: I'm not too sure about what year my father came to the United States, but my mother, Mary Gudal Zalac, came here in 1902 from Yugoslavia—a little town called Metlika. It's about 30 miles south of Ljubliana in northern Yugoslavia. She came to Ellis Island. She talked about that and the Statue of Liberty quite a bit. She was, I think, 14 years old when she came with her sister, who was two years older. They traveled by themselves to Pueblo, Colorado. Their father was there. He was divorced from his wife. He left Yugoslavia at an early age—I don't know when—but he sent for them. He was a miner in Pueblo, and worked in the mines there around Leadville and Silverton. That's where my mother met my father. She was 15 or 16 years old, I guess, when they got married.

Mother had a family and moved to Murray, Utah. In 1906 my oldest sister was born in Murray. (I think it was Murray—I'm not sure.) [laughter] My other sister, Helen,

was born in 1908. My brother George and sister Helen were born in Midvale, Utah. George was born in 1910. Helen has the Grand Cafe in Susanville, California. She's been in the same location for 50 years. The cafe was in the paper; she had a little write-up. Later the family moved from Midvale to Tooele, Utah, where my brother Eddy, sister Rose, and myself were all born.

Mother and Father moved to McGill, Nevada, in 1922. My father worked in the smelter. He knew quite a bit about stone masonry, and they built the brick furnaces for the smelter in 1922. I don't know how many times they might have revamped the smelter down there in McGill. My parents were there one year, and then they moved back to Utah to a little town called Scofield. They had coal mines there. I think they were underground coal mines. I was six years old, and I don't remember too much of that. That's when my mother and father separated.

My mother and us children moved back to Ruth, Nevada. My oldest sister got married. Mother then ran a little boardinghouse

for miners. She did their laundry, cooked and gave them room and board—\$30 with laundry; three square meals a day. She worked hard and raised the kids.

In 1926 Mother and us children moved to Virginia City. There was more activity in mining at that time in Virginia City than there was in Ruth, and a lot of the miners who were her boarders in Ruth had moved to Virginia City. They were making more pay than they were working in the open pit mines in Ruth and Copper Flat, where the pay scale was pretty low. Virginia City had deep shaft mines. All the deep mines were working, and it was hot—bad working conditions. But all the miners came over to Virginia City to go to work. So my mother came over here.

Mother bought a house on the Divide in 1926. Mining companies or mining at that time was pretty unpredictable, and towards the end of the year the deep mines shut down. So we went back to Ruth. In September of 1927 we were back there to start school, but my sister Helen—next to the oldest—stayed an extra year and graduated from the Fourth Ward School in Virginia City, class of 1927. I think there were eight or nine students in her graduating class.

We lived in Ruth until 1929. The Depression was starting to hit, and we moved to Butte, Montana. My mother had remarried, and her husband was a miner. We went to Butte, and he worked in the mines up there. They were working two weeks on and a week off, as they tried to keep everybody working up there. That was during the Depression years.

My mother wanted to come back to Nevada. She liked Nevada. In 1933 my mother and my stepfather sold their little home in Butte, and we came back to Virginia City. My mother and stepfather [divorced] in a couple of years. Then she finished raising her family

by herself and ran her boardinghouse—never remarried again.

*Kathryn Totton: Had she held onto the boardinghouse that she bought back in 1926?*

Yes, we still had that home. So we come back to that.

*How many boarders on an average did you have in your boardinghouse?*

She'd have maybe six or seven boarders, and they paid \$30 a month each. That included their laundry, and three meals a day—you know, breakfast and dinner. They all worked different shifts at the mines, so she had to prepare a lunch for them. Some were on graveyard shift—go to work at 11:00 at night, get off at 7:00 in the morning. Some were on the swing shift—go to work at 3:00 p.m., get off at 11:00 p.m. Day shift started at 7:00 in the morning and got off at 3:00 in the afternoon. None of them were ever on the same shifts. It was kind of a rugged working life for her. Mother stayed in Virginia City until she died at the age of 94 in 1982.

*What was the nationality of the miners who stayed at your mother's boardinghouse?*

Most of them were Yugoslavs. People stayed with their nationalities, mostly. You had the Italians staying at a little hotel called the Tahoe House, where the Virginia City Museum is now. The Tahoe House had a rooming house upstairs—you know, rooms like a hotel—and they served food. Most of your Italians would stay there, and those from lower in the boot—Sicilians and that.

The Varischetti Rooming House was run by a woman in town. It's where the Frederick's



House building was and where the Julia Bulette Museum is now. It's on the corner of Union and C streets—next to the Bucket of Blood, just on the other side of the street. Mrs. Varischetti had her hotel there and had boarders. She came from Grass Valley, California. She has some sons around here yet. She had a boardinghouse which housed everybody.

The Silver Dollar Hotel was a boardinghouse. A lot of the miners would stay there. At some of the restaurants in town you could get a meal ticket for \$13 a week. It'd last you a week. A lot of people would eat in the cafes in town and stay in the hotel. The Virginia Hotel burned down, I think, in 1937. It was run by a Yugoslav. They called him Pop Tarich. He had maybe 20 rooms, and miners stayed there. He served food also. He was quite a character.

In those days, they didn't have refrigeration. We had a little cooler. We had a pantry window on the outside of the pantry, and we had a box built out there with shelves in it and burlap sacks on the outside. You'd buy three or four tons of coal in the wintertime...a cord of wood, maybe, for kindling to start the fire. Then it was mostly coal—three or four tons of coal to get you through the winter. Mother had her own smokehouse and used to buy a hog from the farmers in Dayton. They used to come around with wagons and sell vegetables, butter and that. She'd buy a hog and smoke her own hams and bacon. She'd put it up for the winter. You'd have to smoke it so it would keep; that was the best way you could preserve it. Times were tough, but she got along pretty well. [laughter] Everybody was healthy.

*Did she have any help at all?*

No. When Helen, my sister, was home she'd naturally help her some, setting tables

and waiting on tables; they helped that way, but otherwise she did it all herself. She'd be up at 4:00 in the morning and maybe go to bed by 10:00 or 11:00. They had it tough. At that time there were no washing machines. They had scrub boards—you know, washboards. They had their washtub and a colander, they called it—one of those oblong, copper-bottomed tubs they'd heat water in. They'd put that on the stove and heat their water. She made her own bread; always bought the flour by a 100-pound bag. They didn't have Crisco and stuff like that in them days; they used lard! [laughter] But I guess it was all good. Everybody thought Mazola oil at that time was terrible, and now it turns out it was the best you could be using all the time! [laughter]

There was no fancy food—just good basic food that would allow you to put in an eight-hour shift working in the mine. It was always good. Basically, there was always meat, potatoes and bread, salads and vegetables. We never sat down that you didn't have meat and potatoes, it seemed like. No matter what meal it was during the day, you'd have some. We always had ham and eggs or bacon and eggs for breakfast or stuff like that.

Mother used to buy her eggs by the crate. She had a double-compartment crate, and it had 12 dozen on each side. Cliff's ranch down here used to deliver. He'd come up there in an old Model T Ford truck and deliver butter and eggs and stuff like that. Cliff's ranch was near Franktown on the old highway going to Reno. It was right close to where Walter Clark lived when he wrote the book, Track of the Cat; he was living there in Washoe Valley. He later moved to Virginia City, too. At that time, too, the Indians from Pyramid Lake used to come with their pickup loads of trout and sell fresh trout. They used to come up here and you could buy a 30-pound trout. The Indian men would go door to door selling them; a



lot of times the women would sell the fish, too. There might be a man and wife. They'd have their little truck. Of course, by this time you were able to buy ice. They'd pack it in ice and come.. .till the ice melted. Then when they were getting panicky, you got bargains! [laughter]

The farmers from Dayton used to come up all the time and sell their produce from their truck gardens. One guy was Homer Quiriconi. He's Italian. There was a kid, Joe Richie, that went to school when I did. He was the county commissioner from Dayton in Lyon County for quite a few years. He served for several years, I think. His family had a ranch right on the river as you go into town, on the right. His family used to come up with produce, too, and my mother used to buy pigs from Richie.

Cliff would come up from Franktown, from his ranch, and he'd bring the butter and eggs and stuff like that. They'd make a trip once a week, anyway. He had a regular route that he'd go to—steady customers, where they'd buy so much butter and so many dozens of eggs. He'd save for them and just come every week. Even in the wintertime, they'd try to make it through the snow.

At that time, they didn't have the snow plows. Geiger Grade'd be closed all winter until the fellow that had the grocery store up there—George Wilson—would get a bunch of the school kids in the spring and take them out. There's one bad spot, Alexander's on Geiger Grade, where they'd go out there and there'd be huge drifts. With shovels they'd shovel it out and open up the road. When the deep mines were working, a lot of times they'd bring supplies up through the mines. They'd come through the Sutro Tunnel to the 1,700 foot-level of the Combination shaft. They supplied the town with groceries, coal and stuff like that. A lot of it would come

up through the mines. The mine owners cooperated with the townspeople when it was a bad winter, and they couldn't get out on the old Geiger Grade, a dirt road.

The present Geiger Grade was started in 1933. That was one of the WPA [Works Progress Administration] projects. I have pictures of the guys working with pick and shovel on that road—pictures of a whole crew. Might be 30, 40 men working on just one bend, so you can imagine how many years it took them to build the road. They used Geiger Grade then. There's one bad turn they called the Devil's Point, Devil's Curve. There's a big bend right below it called White House Bend. There used to be springs there. That's where they used to stop and rest their horses. They had a watering trough there.

They used to make it to the springs with their Model T's and Model A's—let them cool off, get water. A lot of the Model T's had to back up the grade. They couldn't pull going up, because the gas tank sat above the dashboard and it was just gravity flow, so they'd have to back up so the gas'd get to the engine. [laughter] They used to burn the clutch bands up. The same in Gold Hill, you know. The old Model T always carried an extra set of bands. They would get hot and burn, I guess. They were belts that would work around a pulley or something. Then they'd get hot and burn—you'd have to put new ones on.

Fixing a flat tire in those days was something. Everybody'd have to take the tire off of those big old rims. You had to fight them and get them apart, put them back, pump them by hand, and patch the leak in the inner tube. Boy, it was something. It was an all-day trip just to go to Reno and back.

*Did you travel to Reno very often?*

Well, we didn't. Few had cars in those days, but whoever did... like George Wilson that had the store, he'd have to go and get supplies. I remember when we came back from Ruth and when we went back, it took us two days. We rented a big truck to haul our furniture and that. It was a graveled road all the way. You might have five or six flat tires. It's 325 miles. If you made it to Austin—that's halfway—in one day, 120 miles, you did great, and that's driving from daylight until dark.

It's hard to imagine how much progress they've made in the highways. Earl Games's horses were used to pull the scrapers and Fresnoes on the dirt roads. They'd wet the roads down to level them and to take all of the corduroys and the bumps out. It'd be like a washboard. You just chattered along. They used those to level and regrade the roads. We didn't have an oiled road into Virginia City until 1934, 1935, something like that when they started oiling the truck route, and Geiger Grade was completed around 1938.

*Those new roads weren't even paved?*

No. I can remember when we were in Virginia City, to go to Bowers Mansion was a big treat for everybody. They'd have a picnic down there once a year, or they'd go down to Lake Tahoe. Sometimes you'd load up one of the flatcars and go on the Virginia & Truckee then. You'd put everybody on; they'd have a railing around. Take all the kids and then go to Bowers for a picnic. The road from Bowers to Reno was concrete at that time—1926. It was so narrow barely two cars could pass on it, but they poured concrete, so that was built before they had the oil. And they lasted. Now they're going back to concrete, but it's so damn expensive. But there was a stretch in there where it was concrete. And, of course, Reno had streetcars.

*Do you remember riding on the streetcars?*

At one time, yes. They just had it to go out to the ball park—Threlkel's Ball Park. It went that far to Sparks. Then the streetcar would go out to Moana Hot Springs. That was quite a ways out of town then. When I was a kid, Mount Rose Street was the city limits, coming out. That's the heart of town now. When you crossed Fourth Street, why, you were practically out of the city limits going north.

Threlkel's Hall Park had a semi-pro baseball team. Most of those players worked at the Reno Garage. It was about halfway out to Sparks before you would make the turn on B Street—it was just in that area there on East Fourth Street [located in area of what is now the 600 block of East 4th Street—Ed.].

*Was there a large community of Virginia city people in Butte when you were there?*

Well, there were a lot of people that were from Virginia City. Matter of fact, when I went to Butte, I was in the sixth grade. The schoolteacher that I had—her name was Fitzgerald—was originally a Hinch from Gold Hill. She taught in Gold Hill. Miss Fitzgerald was an aunt of Alice Byrne. She was from the Flinch family, and there were Flinches in Butte, too. But they're all associated with Virginia City. I think Marcus Daley, who discovered Butte, went up there from Virginia City, originally. So the two towns are pretty well tied together through the mining.

*I'm interested in the way that people seemed to come back to Virginia City.*

The miners were always on the go. They would hit one place; they'd stay six months or a year. Then they'd go on to Grass Valley, Jackson,

Amador or Nevada City. They'd work down there for six months or something. They'd get disgusted. They'd either get fired or something else would happen and they'd leave. They might go to another town that would be starting to boom. So they were kind of drifters. They'd go from one place to another. Eventually, they had a regular circuit; they'd just be all around. It might take them two or three years, but they made the loop! [laughter] And then after five or six years, they'd come back again to work in Virginia City. They were on the go a lot. They would be here for six weeks, a couple of months or maybe just long enough to make a bankroll to get someplace else, and then they'd take off.

In the early days, if you worked in the deep mines in Virginia City, you were called a "hot water plug." The deep mines in Butte were awful hot, too. If you were hunting for work, like during the Depression, when we went to Butte, all you had to do was tell them that you were a hot water plug. If you told them that you worked in the mines in Virginia City, you went right to work up there. If you were able to cut it in Virginia City, that was the kind of miners they wanted up there. They put them right to work.

#### **MINERS ON THE COMSTOCK IN THE 1930S**

The miners used to take white rats and mice down in the deep mines, where they used them to indicate when the air was bad. The mice and rats would also leave the area if the mine was in danger of a cave-in. So it was a safety feature for the miners when they were underground. I can remember rats coming up through the sewer and coming up from under the wooden sidewalk. It was nothing to see a white rat pop up from under the sidewalk! [laughter] But they'd come up from the mines, and this was after the mines had shut down, so naturally they were hunting

for food where the miners used to feed them. What the miners didn't eat in their lunch, they would throw to the rats and the mice underground. If the air was getting bad, you'd see the rats leaving. If there was danger of a cave-in, they could sense it. They could sense the ground moving way before a human being could ever realize it.

You would hear of water in the mine shafts being so hot that you could take fresh eggs down, put them in the water and have soft- or hard-boiled eggs. That's how hot it was. Originally, the reason they used the ice in the early days was for the miners underground. They used to pack their boots, it was so hot. They had rubber boots and maybe just shorts or a pair of short Levis or something they worked in, because it was so warm. But they'd pack these rubber boots in ice. They'd go in, and they used to work 20 minutes running a drift. Then they'd come to the station where it's cooler and spend 20 minutes, and the partner'd be in there. They'd keep changing off—there might be two miners in there working and two out at the station all the time. They used to take maybe a ton of ice down to each station in the mine for every shift. It was so hot, it was unbearable.

Most of the old miners who hung around were characters—there were a lot of them. They were all different nationalities. Every one of them was a character in his own right! [laughter] For instance, one little Finn worked in the mines there. Until he had a drink, you couldn't get him to smile or say boo. If he said hello, it was damn near under his breath, he was so shy. As soon as he had a few drinks every payday, he'd go home, and he'd get these little jingle bells they used to put on horses around Christmastime. He had a little string of those bells, and he'd wrap them around his body under his shirt. He had to have a few drinks, and he'd get out and start dancing,

and then you couldn't get him to shut up. His name was Kibby, but he'd call himself Kibby, King of the Finns. He'd sing and dance up a storm! [laughter] So you'd know when it was payday, if you walked in!

Little Johnny, the Giant, was a black Swede—real black hair and dark complected, but from Sweden. His name was Johnny Martin. They called him Johnny, the Giant. He was about 5 foot tall, but he was built like a fireplug—very husky. All those miners still had the dialect from their native countries; most of them came from Europe. They came over here because of land opportunity. Johnny came here, and here he was a boss in the mines. Half of those bosses couldn't even read or write. They'd have somebody else fill out their time cards and that. But they were good miners, and they had a way with miners; they were liked. So they made bosses out of these guys. The bosses could get quite a bit of work out of the miners.

Another Finn, Johnny Hoppola, was the overman working underground in Con. Chollar [Consolidated Chollar, Gould & Curry, and Savage Mining Company) in Gold Hill. Originally the mine was called Overman. Later in the 1930s it was changed to the Con. Chollar. Johnny Hoppola had a real deep voice. They had a telephone on each level where you could call the engineer's room that ran the hoist and talk to him. If you needed something sent down or if you had to contact the office, they could contact the engineer on top, who could get ahold of the office or whatever was needed. Hoppola'd get on the phone, and no matter who was there, he'd say, "Hey, kid, come here! My voice not good for the phone. Here, you answer it!" [laughter] He was the boss, but you'd have to do his communicating for him. But he was another good miner. [laughter] There have been some fine men.

An old miner that came from Butte must have been in his seventies when I was just a kid. I was helping him in the mines, and nobody could get along with him—cranky old son-of-a-gun. His name was Charlie Boyle. He didn't have any teeth, and he always smoked one of those Italian cigars. If you've ever smelled one of those, you know it could knock you out. Imagine being underground with poor ventilation! He'd have one of those cigars going all the time. Not too many men could handle smoking them, but he smoked one all the time. He was always a hard-boiled, tough old man, you know. He used to get in a lot of fights.

Huey O'Donnell was another old-timer. He was an old Irishman. He'd work in the mines up there for like a year; save every paycheck.... He would live off of one till it was gone and never cash the others. The mining company'd get on him to cash the checks, but he'd save a bankroll.

In those days, in Reno, they had a red light district down there on the river. They must've had 50 women working all the time. It was where the police station on East Second and High streets is now. It was right behind there, right along the river. This place had a big, high fence around it. When you walked in there it was like going into another town. They had all these little cribs where all the girls would work. Huey'd save until he had a bankroll; then he'd go to town. He'd get drunk and go down there, and they'd roll Huey. He might go in with \$200 or \$300 or something like that. Two or three days later he'd come back to Virginia City broke.

Huey gave up his job, and now he's busted. He walked up to Charlie Boyle and said, "Charlie, could you loan me ten? Dixie told me he'd put me to work in a couple of days." [laughter] And now he's bumming tough Charlie Boyle for \$10. Boyle loaned him the \$10.

Later they're at the bar and Charlie felt sorry for Huey. It was payday, so he said, "Come on, Huey. I'll buy you a drink." They had two or three drinks. After about the fourth drink, Huey O'Donnell was feeling pretty good, so he put the ten up!

[laughter] Now, he's supposed to live on this, and he started to buy drinks from the ten! Old Boyle got mad and took a swing at him, cussed him out. He'd given him \$10 to live on, not to.... And here after three, four drinks he was ready to spend it.

Huey was down a-wrestling for a job at the mine. He was down there, and the boss was there. He was telling the foremen, Dixie Randall, "Dixie, have you heard the latest? Boyle swung on me last night." [laughter] So he started to tell Dixie what happened. But he said, "You know, the Boyles never could defeat the O'Donnells." They were characters like that—just so funny. It was nice to know these old people out there. They were old men, and they still carried on like that. [laughter]

This one Yugoslav—they called him Crybaby Tony [Tony Stosic]—was a big, powerful man, maybe 6 foot 4 or 5. He was the strongest man I think I've ever seen in my life. He could take a 50 cent coin and bend it in his fingers. He could take a dime, put it in his teeth and bend it by clamping down with his fingers.

Tony was such a good-natured man. He was strong son-of-a-gun. His family were, I think, from around McGill or Ely. His wife was with him. He had several children, and they were all born in this country. But it was always everybody's dream to go back home where they were born and get back on their farm and live the life of Riley. Then, after five or six years their bankroll'd be gone they'd be busting their buns and not getting any place.. . just surviving. So Tony had enough money to get a ticket, enough to get back to

the United States. He went back to the mines, but he couldn't save anything without his wife. Then you get \$75 every two weeks working in the mines and you had to pay your board and room and everything out of it, it was pretty hard to save enough money to send for your family. It would cost maybe a couple thousand dollars, at that time, to get them over—maybe fifteen hundred. It's hard to save that much. He finally got one son over here. I think the rest of the family is still over there, and he had six or seven children.

Another high school kid that I went to school with weighed about 150 pounds; I weighed about 140. Every payday Tony'd go to town and get drunk like damn near all the miners did. Just nothing to do; no recreation, but go to the bars. We'd meet him on the street. He'd bend down—he had enormous hands—and we'd each stand in one, and then he'd stand up. He's 6 foot 5, and he could just pick us up like that! [laughter] Powerful! They later came out with this song, "Big Bad John." That fit this man to a tee, that song did.

In those days, every grocery store seemed to be run by Italians, and a lot of the bars were Italian. They always had those big calendars with a pretty Italian girl with a rose in her hair or something on them. These guys would start singing, and Tony would sing, too. He'd be drinking a glass of wine and trying to give the calendar girl a sip of the wine. He'd be reminiscing a lot about his life, and he cried a lot. He always wore a tie, and when he got drunk, he'd throw it over his shoulder. He could flex his arm muscle and rip a brand-new shirt. Most of them were linen then. He was just that strong a man. When they wrote that song, "Big Bad John," it reminded me of this guy—kind of fit him, you know? He was such a good-natured guy, it was unbelievable.

Tony worked in the mine up there for the Con. Virginia [Consolidated Virginia]



Company in the central tunnel. They were drifting old workings, putting this drift in. It's all loose ground above them and below them. Old-timers left pillars of ore to help support the area that was being mined. They were going in to rob these pillars. This was in the late 1930s, and it was really dangerous. You could hear the ground moving; it'd started trickling. Most of the miners wouldn't work, but Tony wanted to work. He, another fellow—a miner by the name of Claus Martens—and the shift boss, William Randolph, were in there. It caved from below them—sucked them down. When it dropped, the concussion kicked the shift boss into the front of the tunnel where it was safe. The other two guys went down. Tony was killed. He had a 4-by-6 piling go right through his stomach. Claus Martens had one leg crushed. They couldn't get him out it was so dangerous. They had to get a court's permit to amputate Martens's leg, and they left it there so they could get the body out. [The 30 September 1940, edition of the Virginia City News states that both Stosic and Martens were killed in the mining accident of 16 September 1940.—Ed.]

They gave a contract to some miners to get Tony's body. You're supposed to get the body out, and they couldn't get it out....I worked at the Dayton mine then. They had a motor that they hauled ore cars with. These motors were operated by batteries, and they weighed about a ton. We had a chain jack, and we jacked these motors off of these cars. We put them on the bench where they were put on chargers, so they charged them. They had two of them—one was charging, and one was in use all the time.... These miners came down and borrowed that chain jack, and they tried to get this big man out. They were afraid to go down there; it was too dangerous. They put the chain jack around his body and just pulled him apart—brought about half of him

out. Nobody knows that, because that would be against the law. They'd have to get a permit to do that. But these guys had a contract to get him out, so.... I know, because I was a pallbearer for Tony when he was buried. This man weighed about 270 pounds, but it was a very light coffin that we were carrying. He was a big man. So I know that's what they did. You could have lost somebody else's life, too, if they tried to get the body out. But, it was one of those things you couldn't do—abandon them.

There were a lot of people like that. All these miners had something about them that you liked and respected. They had good morals, most of them. If they told you something, why, you could bet on that; they would do it. Of course, you had a few bad ones, but 90 percent of them were very honest and honorable. If they couldn't meet it, they'd let you know before, whatever it was. They were pretty honest people. A lot of times they'd have to get enough money to leave one camp and go to another, and you might not hear from them for two or three years. Then all of a sudden, bang—they'd repay you, a little interest, maybe, and feel bad because they couldn't do it sooner. They were good people to know.

The miners had their rivalries. There were the Cornish and the Cousin Jacks, as they called them—they were the English; they all hung together. The Italians kind of hung together. The Irishmen hung together. There would be a bar that was run by one of their countrymen, and that would be like their headquarters. They'd all mingle; most of them got along pretty good, but the Cousin Jacks and the Irish never got along. The Cornish hung out at the Senate Bar, which was later changed to the Bucket of Blood. Every payday the Irish'd have to go over to the Senate to whip the bloody Cousin Jacks. [laughter] Then the war'd be on! The

bartender'd come out, and he'd have a pick handle and start whaling on those Irishmen. The miners referred to the bar as the "bloody bucket." Then after payday when they'd get down to the mine, they'd say, "Well, the bloody bucket had it last night again." Later on, when the tourists started, the Senate wasn't too attractive a name to the tourists, so they called it the Bucket of Blood. That's how it got the name, but it was called the Senate prior to that.

### **MINING AND MILLING, 1930S-1940S**

I was working in the mine when the dust bowl hit in Oklahoma in the late 1930s. Everybody was migrating with whatever they had. All those people were losing their farms. Those people were really up against it. They'd come hunting for a job. We were making \$4.25 a day; they offered to work for \$3.25 a day. They would work for anything. They wanted to put some bread on the table. They were hungry.

*Were they hired?*

They didn't know anything about mining, or they would have been. It wasn't like going out, taking care of crops, tending cows or something with a dairy. The underground was kind of dangerous, and you could jeopardize whoever you were working with if you didn't know about mining. You had to be trained. You had to learn how to go along before they could turn you loose. But they wanted work.

Then the old boss, Alec Chism, would come down. He had a nickname. They called him "The Fish." I don't know why. But he was always something. He was quite a diplomat. He always tried to build up a little competition between your shift and the other shift. He would tell you what they'd done. He tried to

get more out of you. He was very clever the way he did it.

I was down there working. I was either tramming or mucking in the stope; it's just labor work. These guys'd be rustling for a job up there. I remember buying a car. I had a 1938 Chevy Master Deluxe, and I think it cost \$995. I needed that job, and the boss said, "Kid, do you like this job?"

I said, "Yes."

"Well," he said, "you know, you better keep your head down and your butt up because them guys up there, they're offering to work for a dollar a day less." [laughter] We were contracting all the time, because there were so many people hunting for a job.

*Which mine was this?*

The Con. Chollar in Gold Hill. In those days they called it the Overman. Later they called it the Con. Chollar. The Dayton mine down there was the same. But these all came on later. They weren't the deep mines. These were all in Silver City or Gold Hill.

I worked in the New York. That's the mine that has the gallows frame. Then I worked in the Yellow Jacket, and that's where they had the big tire underground in the early days. We were working in the old workings where the old-timers already worked. We were going back, because they quit when their mill heads were probably \$4 to \$6. They quit when they couldn't make it with \$6 ore. We were going back after that, because they improved the methods of ore processing a little bit. They could make a little money on \$6 ore. We were robbing what the old-timers had left. The company then could make a little money on what they considered a waste.

*What was the difference in the new and old ways of processing the ore?*



It was in the milling processes. They were getting better recovery. It used to be that they probably got 70 percent of the silver and maybe only 80 percent of the gold. This time around they might be getting 92 percent of the gold and maybe 80 percent of the silver. They had methods of getting a little better production, of getting more through the mill. They could probably mill more in 24 hours than in the earlier days and get better recovery. So they could make a little money on what the old-timers left.

They used to leave pillars to give strength to the area where they were working. They'd always leave one solid pillar, and they'd work around it. Well, now we're going after those pillars, because a lot of them had good ore in them. That's what the Houston Company, which wanted to move the highway, were after. That's why they wanted to move the road, because in the Imperial where they wanted to go, they left all these pillars near the surface to give support to the ground so it wouldn't settle. There they've got the pillars, the road has now settled. It has settled some all the time. If they could have moved the road, some of those pillars would have been like the original discovery—really a lot of value in them. So it would have been worth a lot if they could have moved the road. I think they could have done a lot of good for the town, but people don't want to see mining any more. It could've done good for the tax base.

The Storey County authorities wouldn't let American Flat put trailers in because of historic preservation. That's for the birds when that's the greatest mining area in the world. And to have somebody dictate that you can't do this or you can't do that, somebody that's never been around.... There wouldn't be a Virginia City if we hadn't had mining. It bothers me to have a few people that dictate

the future of Virginia City. I think Virginia City's too big to have somebody dictate what should be done to them. That's the way I look at it. None of us'd be here if it hadn't been for our pioneers. They came out and settled and had to do a lot of things.

I don't know if anybody brought it up to you or not—when Zeb Kendall came here and bought the Con. Virginia in 1919, all the deep mines were still working then. And they formed what they called a merger company. That's when they all merged together; they built the haulage tunnel, built the American Flat mill.

Now, in the old days they used to haul ore to the mills down on the Carson River. Then there was a couple of mills that they tried afterward that they built up there, but they weren't modern enough. Well, when Kendall come they connected all of the deep mines, I think on the 1,200 foot level—that would be the Sierra Nevada, the Union, the Ophir, the Con. Virginia, the Savage, the Hale & Norcross, Chollar, the Combination, the Imperial in Gold Hill, Yellow Jacket, the Overman, and I think the New York. And the haulage tunnel went to the American Flat mill at American Flat. They built that big mill down there, and it cost \$3 or \$4 million at that time, which was an enormous amount of money. But they didn't build it in segments that could be operated individually. They built it so that when you turn the power on the whole mill had to start working. It was a big plant.

All the mines, all the different companies that merged together to build this haulage tunnel, the mill...well, they'd all shipped whatever ore they had down there, and the mill was going 24 hours a day. Now the Depression hit and the mines have got to shut down.

In the early 1930s there were a lot of leasers up there in Virginia City. They were making money leasing, where the companies'd

lease out a certain level in a mine where they could work, or they worked all over town on different mining projects. They could have sent their ore down there to the American Flat mill, but the mill couldn't operate on a small scale. They couldn't operate the crusher by itself. If they crushed the ore and they had it through the ball mill, and they wanted to start milling it and put it through the tanks in the cyanide...well, then, the crusher would still have to keep working, see? It wasn't built in segments, so it couldn't be used for the leasers, for the small mines.

Then in the 1930s everybody started building mills. Sierra Nevada built a mill; Con. Virginia had to build another; Arizona Comstock, they had to build another mill. They built the Crown Point mill where the Savage is, where the Imperial was. They built the Con. Chollar mill. They put a mill in Dayton for the Dayton Company, the New York—all that property. William Donovan put up his mill down there at Silver City. All of these mills were built because American Flat was standing down there—the big mill. It couldn't be operated because they couldn't have the tonnage to make it feasible.

The owners of the American Flat mill would have kept it intact for later on. They went to the county commissioners in 1932 or 1933 and asked them to cut down on the taxes. The commissioners refused them, and they have since just refused. They said they had too much invested, they couldn't walk away from it. The owners told them, "If you don't lower taxes we're going to have to junk the mill." They couldn't afford the taxes. Well, the commissioners were kind of stupid, and they wouldn't play ball with them. So they sold the mill for junk. They salvaged whatever they could and closed...they got rid of it. And if the mill had been feasible where they could rewire it and have it operating in different

segments as they needed them, they wouldn't have needed all those other mills. The Crown Point mill—they got a loan from the federal government to build it, I think through the WPA or something. [laughter] Hey, it's really something!

Now they built that big mill down there, but it's an entirely different system that they now use than what they were using at that period. They were using cyanide tanks. They still use the cyanide, but it's all a leaching process now, where they built the big ponds and they put the ore out there, and they had a big lake, you know. All of the solutions were in this lake, and everything's submerged. It just leaches out the gold and silver, and then it's picked up later as it's coming out. They've been doing that for years with copper. They would put metal—tin or anything—in this copper water, and the copper would eat up the tin and that, but it would replace it with copper. And this works similar to that.

In older times they had the mills and they had the agitators. They had great big huge tanks, and these agitators would be in there. You'd have your cyanide solution in there, and it was more or less working the same way, but it wasn't as efficient as what they're doing.... What they're doing now might take a little longer, but it's more efficient, and they get a better recovery. If it was sulfite form they would use the cyanide in the cyanide plants. And if it was free gold, then they could use the flotation system. It was all tanks and agitators, and then they had to have traps where they would pick the gold up as it run out through chutes up there. The gold is heavy, and it would settle, and then, they'd pick it up later. I never have worked in a mill, but I think that's the general idea of the way they worked.

Now, recovery is all by leach plants. It's in ponds outside that they do it. I haven't been

around them myself now; it's something new. In the old days, like the 1930s and 1940s, they might get 70 percent recovery of the value of silver in a ton of ore. And on gold they might get 80 to 88 percent. Then some of the mills later on were getting like 90, 92 percent, which is very good. But now they get like 98 and 99 percent recovery.

If ore didn't go \$6 a ton, they couldn't make anything on it. But now with the big production they got, and the equipment to move it, hell, they can put through maybe a thousand tons a day, where most of those little mines in the past, if they averaged 50 tons a day it was pretty good. So it's just big production. That's why they're all going to the open pit, and that's why Virginia City let go and mined all of the dumps in there. You don't have the timber and the high cost—pumping water, hoisting all your ore and that. With this big equipment they can just open pit it and take these big trucks. They can get up to 50 tons a load, and it takes them five minutes to get it, where the old mines might have 40 men working and only get maybe 125 tons a day. So you got a crew of 50, plus the cost of hoisting, pumping water, timbering.... Timber is so expensive now. You know, you can't afford it now. If they want a dollar a foot for six-by-eights or something.... it's just grim.

*There was still, you said, some mining going on in the 1940s.*

Well, there was quite a bit. Before the war, all the mines were working. The gold mines in Gold Hill and Silver City were working up till 1942, when we got into the Second World War. The miners were forced to leave when the gold mines and silver mines were closed by President Roosevelt, because all of the material they were getting was needed somewhere else, in strategic minerals like

lead, zinc, copper, and tungsten—stuff that contributed to the war effort. They forced the miners to go into that kind of work. [In October, 1942, the War Production Board issued Limitation Order L-208, effectively closing the nation's gold mines. However, restrictions on gold mining had begun almost immediately following Pearl Harbor.—Ed.] So they forced these gold mines to close, but these companies still maintained; they kept the same taxes they were paying. They got the mills and they got all that equipment there. They kept it all intact. All the years that they were forced to be closed, they were paying taxes. They were the ones that kept the county alive and kept it going—they were paying the bills.

After the war the gold and silver prices got to where these companies could operate again, but they could not afford to buy the timber to mine underground like they used to. When they mined underground, timber was cheap. You could buy a thousand feet of eight-by-eights for maybe \$10 or \$15 a thousand. Now it costs you \$500 or \$1,000 for a thousand feet. It's just prohibitive. But these companies hung together hoping to go back and mine again. When they got a chance to go back in and make a little profit for what they spent all those years, somebody had moved in and said, "Now, we don't want it." Some environmentalist said, "No, it's going to spoil my air...[laughter] It's going to hurt my eardrums, or it's going to create too much dust." They had kept the country alive all those years.

The mining companies had the power of condemnation. If you had a patented mining claim, you gave somebody surface rights just to give them a place to live on. He didn't own the ground. You sold him a place to build a house. You deeded it to him; he's got 10 feet of surface rights. You did it so that you could

build up a labor supply for yourself. People had to live. But now it's reversed. [laughter] Now that 10 feet dictates what goes on at all and it doesn't seem right.

*Are there any remaining mines which held on during this time?*

There were, but finally they were forced out. Zeb Kendall, who had the Con. Virginia, paid taxes all the time. He bought the Con. Virginia and the Ophir—the biggest deep mines up there. I don't know, but he paid like a million dollars in 1919. That was an awful lot of money at that time. He kept it going. When I was the county commissioner up there in 1949, he was delinquent in his taxes for something like two years. Property reverted to the county if you couldn't pick up your back taxes, the advertising penalties and stuff. He owed \$4,000 or \$5,000 in taxes. Now here he's kind of busted.

Just prior to that, the highway department came and built C Street. It's part of the highway system; the highway department maintains it. They raised the street up to meet the government specifications. The bill with Taylor Street on it is much steeper. They added a lot of fill in there, made the street a little bit wider. The sewers are down there 12 or 14 feet in fill. They were wooden boxes, see, and then they started replacing them with concrete pipes. At this time some of these here boxes collapsed. Now, to repair that, it's going to cost a fortune, because you would have to breast board all of that ground to trench down there and dig down 12 or 15 feet. You know, you'd have to do just like you work in a mine. It would cost you a fortune.

The mining company that owned the Con. Virginia before Mr. Kendall was going to try to siphon water out of the mine with an inverted siphon, like they used to bring the water from

Marlette Lake to Virginia City. Marlette Lake is higher than Virginia City, so it's brought in a wooden flume, and when it comes through Washoe Valley at Lakeview Hill it's all steel pipe. All right, so it was two 16-inch lines, the water line, and it went through Lakeview. The pipe's maybe half an inch, three-quarters of an inch thick—pressure pipe. The water coming down from Nanette dropped 2,500 feet to Lakeview, where it was kicked 2,000 feet up to Virginia City, and it was gravity fed all the way to Virginia City. It cost so much money in the mines to pump the water from the lower levels, the mining companies thought, "Well, now, why can't we use this inverted system and drop the water from the flume down in the Con. Virginia mine and use that to pump the water?" They put in a 16-inch line from the flume down the Con. Virginia shaft, and it went right down Taylor Street. They tried it, and it didn't work.

Now, when the county was in such a bind, sewers stopped up—they had no disposal for sewage until just recently they got a sewage plant up there and a disposal system; Gold Hill sewage still runs down the Imperial shaft—Zeb Kendall said, "I will trade you that pipeline. I'll give you that, and you can cut your sewage into there and call my taxes paid."

So the county hooked up the sewer lines to the pressure pipe that went down the Con. Virginia Mining Company shaft. I don't know if we gave him a couple more years or something on his taxes, but.... See, now, he tried to survive all those years. Then when you get a chance to really do some mining, why, somebody says, "No mining." You know, I don't think it's right.

*So are you saying, then, that as early as the 1940s people were objecting to reopening the mines?*

No, they weren't objecting. But at that time the demand for the gold and silver wasn't there. The government closed the mines during World War II and the miners were gone. The cost to start over again deep-mining after the war was too prohibitive. It cost too much at that time to go deep, so the modern method is open pit. See, that's cheaper, and this is what they're opposed to.

I don't think it's fair to the mining people that carried...it wasn't only Kendall, but all the other companies up there that stayed intact for years and years and years. Then, finally, somebody'd buy them up because the price of gold has gone up. They think, "Well, we can go in and we can do something." And then they get all this opposition; they won't let them operate. They make it prohibitive for them. I don't think it's fair, really. That's my opinion. Of course, if it hadn't been for the mines, I wouldn't be here, so I can see their side of it.

*It seemed there wasn't much mining going on in the 1950s and the 1960s.*

Well, there was some in Silver City and Gold Hill. Oh, I've got some great pictures I could show you of Gold Hill—the open pit down there, where they were blasting when the pits were working. see, they all worked open pits in the 1940s and 1950s. Nobody said anything about them. It was just part of the mining process, and everybody accepted them. Nobody bitched.

Donovan had an open pit down there; he wanted to open pit where his mine was. He moved the road that goes through Gold Hill—it used to run over along the hill. You can see where Donovan's pit is down there now—the big hole on the right before you hit Silver City, going down. The highway used to be over there, and he built it over here. He had permission from the highway department and

from the county to move it. They built it on that side, and it spares the location so he could open pit. That was done in the 1950s. Nobody objected. They accepted whatever the mining companies done; it was part of their lifestyle.

All of this here bitching and that, it's come since we got environmentalists and all that. Never had them before, see. You know, that's been in the last generation, last 20 years, we get all that. If we need the minerals, they should have a right to be able to get them. We shouldn't have to be buying them from some foreign country, not if we've got them. We were very independent, and it was still free enterprise.

Heck, I can remember when every time they were going to shoot off one of those atomic bombs down out of Las Vegas there at Indian Springs, we'd get out and watch the big mushroom cloud. We could see it from Virginia City just as clear as could be. That big cloud'd form. Yes, we used to get out, and nobody thought anything about it. It was contributing to the war effort. Oh sure! You ask any of the old-timers who lived up there. Yes, we used to go out every time they were going to set one off...and that's when they were shooting them, you know, above ground. You could see that mushroom. There'd be a big flash in the sky and you would see this big red thing forming up there like a mushroom, you know? We used to watch it. They used to set them off like at 4:00, 5:00 in the morning. That's probably when there was the least wind and stuff.

Everything was fine, then; see, even at that period, everything was fine. And this is way after the war; this is getting up around 1950. It was after that, then, they started the sit-ins and all that where they bitched about everything. You can't even smoke a cigarette any more.



### LIFE IN VIRGINIA CITY IN THE 1930S

Virginia City was a good town to raise kids in, for we didn't have problems like we do today! The kids were all trained at home really good. They all had pretty good upbringings. They had a lot of values, a lot of respect for everybody else. You don't find that much any more, I don't think. Not in the average. There are too many things happening up there, like too many narcotics and everything. They'd never heard of narcotics in those days.

They had a Chinatown down where the mines are today. The Chinese had their opium, but it was always kept to themselves. You didn't see it around.

On D Street there was a bar on that level run by a Chinaman named Chung Kee. The miners coming from the Con. Virginia mine would be sopping wet when they came out of the shaft. They walked like through a tunnel. They had it all enclosed—a building or shed over it—where you could walk to the change room, because you'd perspire so much when you came out. The wintertimes'd be really cold. So you'd get to the change room—they were all enclosed—and go in, get your hot bath and change clothes. The miners who worked at Con. Virginia would come out, and then they'd stop at Chung Kee's on D Street.

Normally the miners'd get off shift and go to their favorite bar. They'd buy a glass of beer, and they always got a shot of whiskey for an "aftershifter" when they'd get off of shift. Combined with a beer and fatigue, you're off to the races more or less. [laughter] But this Chinaman made his own wine. Instead of beer, he gave them a glass of his wine. They called it a "Chung Kee liner." It was a glass of wine with a shot of Chinese whiskey with it instead of the American whiskey. Well, after two or three of those, it'd just about frappe you. They were really something!

A lot of miners walked from Virginia City to Silver City to work. They'd put in a shift and then walk back when they got off. That's three miles. But everybody walked; nobody had cars. If you got around during the wintertime, it was on a horse. Some people had horses if they were fortunate and could afford to feed them.

It was really something when all the deep mines were working. They all had steam hoists; they were run by steam then. Everyone'd blow a steam whistle when the shifts changed. They'd blow a whistle at 7:00 in the morning, at noon, maybe at 6:00 at night. That sounded pretty good to hear the whistles go off in town. When the V & T used to come up through Gold Hill, before it would cross the Gold Hill trestle, it'd always blow the whistle.

There was a kid in Gold Hill, Melvin Fell, who was about 13, 14 years old. He could imitate that whistle, and his voice carried. Somehow it'd just carry up those canyons! [laughter] A lot of times you could hear it, and we'd think, "Well, what the hell is the V & T coming to town for now?" It was not on their schedule. This kid'd be down there mimicking the whistle. He was really good. He was like Boxcar Willie. He was fantastic.

There were only a few Indians up in Virginia City. There was an old gentleman they called Jasper. Then there was Andy Antunovich—he was a Yugoslav, but he was married to an Indian woman. There were several families. There are a few that are still around, but not too many. Tony Bob had a little Indian settlement. There's one on the "new road" or truck route going out of town. It has to be below the Chollar Mansion. It's maybe a quarter of a mile down the road up there. There were several little shacks down there that were where the Indians lived. By the cemetery, right below Ophir dumps down

there, there was a little Indian community. It's right across from where the brewery was down there on Six-Mile Canyon. The monks or somebody took over what used to be the brewery. They were teaching down there. They had some of these huts they made where they would go and meditate and stuff like that. But this was in later years. There used to be quite a few little tepees or those Indian-made places there when I was a kid. There were several spots around town where they had them, but they were always on the outskirts somewhere. There might be three, four or five families in each little spot. Not too many.

There was Raymond David. His stepfather was a Castilian—born in Spain. We used to tease him, say something Mexican to him. Oh, man, would he ever hit the ceiling! [laughter] “I’m Castilian!” They’re very serious about it. There was no Indian blood in his veins, and not really much of anything.

People don’t think about how tough it was in the wintertime up there. A lot of times the water’d freeze. We had wooden flumes coming into town. They were all on the surface of the ground, and they leaked. If there was a good snow cover over it they wouldn’t freeze. If not, it would form ice in there and break the flume. Then you’d have to take the miners out of the mine, go up there and work on it. Sometimes it would take four or five days to get water back again. People used to have to fill up buckets and everything, so they could flush their bathrooms, wash their dishes and stuff. They’d go out and melt snow. The winters were rough! Everything was heated with coal and wood.

The coal yard sat just over the hill right below the new elementary grammar school on D Street. They had a siding in there where the V & T came in. There was a tunnel that went

underneath the street in front of the Catholic church. The tunnel went through there down to where the depot is. They had a siding over there, and the coal yard sat just below where Hugh Gallagher Elementary School is. The railroad siding is on the street below where the Mackay mansion is on E Street. They had a little siding in there where they could put the railroad cars loaded with coal and leave them till they’d get them unloaded.

Little Joe Castillio worked for the coal yard that Louie Roth had up there then. Joe Castillio and a couple of other guys unloaded and shoveled all of that coal out of the cars. There might be 65 or 70 tons in a car. They had aluminum or steel buckets like bushel baskets that held about 50 pounds. They would carry coal by the ton. In those days everybody had coal in the winter. From B Street up to the Castle, they had to carry that coal on their shoulders, up those stairs. Sometimes coming down was just as bad. Can you imagine delivering coal in the wintertime? Little Joe wasn’t 5 foot 4 or 5. The muscles and that on his back would build up like a callus. And where that tub’d sit, the muscle would be an inch high on each shoulder. It would just build up that muscle and it’d form like a callus there—a big hump—where that bucket’d rest. For years they did that. Can you imagine what kind of little guys these were? [laughter] They were just unbelievable!

Paul Giraudo, who used to have a grocery store in the north end of town, had a little coal and wood yard. It’s where you go down Six-Mile Canyon. It’s on the left, right on C Street. A little bar, the North End Rest, used to be there. There’s a laundromat in it now. Paul Giraudo had the coal yard, too. He had an ice business, and he used to deliver milk. When I got out of high school, I worked for him one summer there. I used to deliver groceries, and I had a milk route. I would haul



bottles—everything was bottled—and leave milk on everybody's doorstep.

Giraud also had an ice route. He'd go around twice a week or once a week delivering ice all over town. Business places would take 50 or 75 pounds of ice, and little homes would take 5, 10, 25 pounds, mostly. They'd put up ice either in the reservoir in Virginia City or Five Mile Reservoir, where our water supply is. Anyhow, that would freeze over, and they might get a foot thick in the wintertime. So then they'd give the school kids and everybody that was out of work a job. They'd go out and cut ice around the Divide up there where the Jeep Posse has their headquarters now. That building used to be the ice house. They stored their ice in there, and they'd pack it in sawdust.

We'd go up there and get ice. The ice came in 125-pound blocks. Then you'd learn how to cut and deliver ice. When they didn't have bad winters to put up the ice, we'd go to Reno to Crystal Ice Springs down there right where Shoshone Bottling Company used to be—where Center Street would come into Virginia Street—and we'd get a truckload of ice there every week.

About 1934 to 1936, they started getting oil and oil stoves into Virginia City. They started to get oil stoves to heat with. They were like space heaters, like a console. Then you'd have to get 50- or 55-gallon drums of oil. You had to get so you could load and unload them. You'd take them out, put it on a stand and take the empty off by yourself. You just had to learn how to handle it. It's a pretty good knack; it's just a sense of balancing. If you had to lift the drums high, you used two-by-twelves or something where you could roll it most of the time.

Louis Roth, the fellow that had the coal yard prior to Paul Giraud, committed suicide. I don't know why, but he was a nice little Jewish guy. His wife, Flora Roth, was a

wonderful person. I don't know whether he had an illness or something, but he did away with himself.

Flora and Vada Greenhalgh were about the same age. Fine people, you know. Vada's father was with the water company for years, and I think she was born out here on Lakeview Hill over Washoe Lake. Their family moved to Virginia City, where her father was in charge of the water system—the maintenance, the distribution, and fixing the broken pipes up there. In the early days, everything was in wooden flumes. They didn't have pipes. They started putting concrete pipes and stuff like that in for their sewers in the 1930s. Prior to that, the town was just full of wooden boxes for the sewers.

#### **SCHOOL DAYS, FIGURES FROM THE 1930S, AND WORK IN VIRGINIA CITY**

We just had the 50-year reunion of the Fourth Ward School class of 1936. There was about 50 people there or more, and a lot of them I hadn't seen for 30 years. It was sure good to see them!

I remember once we went out on strike from school. They were going to fire our coach and one of the best teachers and principal—they were going to clean house. All the kids went out on a strike. We went and visited each one of the members of the school board and said, "By God, you get rid of them, and we won't go back to school." And they kept them on.

*What teachers?*

Well, mainly Jake Lawlor. They were going to fire him for getting drunk and fighting, raising hell. He went on the wagon and stayed. Matter of fact, I think we kind of changed his career and changed his direction. That was in

1935, 1936. He stayed on, and I think he left in 1938. Then he went some place in California, got a little better spot down there. And he married a local girl from up there; she passed away. She helped straighten him out, too, but the kids had a lot to do with it.

S Was it the whole school that went out on strike?

Yes. Just all of them. Well, there was maybe only 30 kids in high school, but we all went! [laughter] But now wasn't that something?

John Gilmartin was our principal, and what a fine guy. But he liked to nip a little bit, too. [laughter] Poor John.... He went to Gerlach when he left up there. He has since passed away. His grandson is on the college golf team, I think—Mark Gilmartin, quite a golfer. I think John Gilmartin had the high jump record at the University of Nevada for years. He was quite an athlete. Fine, fine person.

Jake Lawlor was quite an athlete himself at the university, you know. He came here from Iowa to the university. In the summers when we lived in Ruth, I remember when he played baseball for McGill. Kennecott Copper would give good athletes a job in the summertime, and they played football or they played baseball. It was to create recreation for the locals. There was nothing doing out there, you know. Ely's 325 miles from Salt Lake and the same from Reno—it's out in the boonies. And all those miners in Ruth and McGill had nothing to do. So every Sunday they had Ruth play McGill in baseball. One Sunday they played in McGill; the next Sunday they played in Ruth. And then on the Fourth of July and Labor Day they played in Ely. So it helped all three towns.

Jake Lawlor was a catcher for McGill, and his brother, Mike Lawlor, played shortstop

for Ruth. I think there was 2 other brother teams like that split up. And man, the wars they used to get into! [laughter] You know, they got pretty competitive. They were all good ball players, but it was terrific. And those miners'd be out there betting their paychecks and hollering—it was really something. They created quite a deal. Then when Jake got out of college, he started teaching in Virginia City—he and Gilmartin both. They were very good athletes.

*How were they as teachers?*

Good. Gilmartin was good in math. Lawlor taught history, and he was a good teacher, too. They got a lot of respect from the kids, you know. There was no fooling around with them, and they knew how to handle the kids; they were well liked by all the kids. They were very stern; they were tough, but still they were fair and good. Of course, like everybody else, once in a while they let their hair down. You know, they're human beings, too, so [laughter] they get in trouble. But they expect too much out of a teacher. You know, you've got to be a role model, and you have to stand up to a lot of standards, and you can't be yourself a lot of times. It was kind of tough for them.

At that time they didn't have any divisions like A, AA and AAA in high school sports. Everybody played any other school. We had 14 boys in high school, and that's when Lawlor made a basketball team out of it. We played Reno, Sparks and Carson, Lovelock, Fallon and Yerington. We played for the state championship in 1936. Carson beat us in the state championship. Isn't that something? That little school up there! And at that time Sparks had a record—I think they went three years without being beaten. They had a terrific team, and a lot of good players on it.

But they finally got beat. But that year, 1936, Carson beat us for the state championship. They had teams prior to that that would be undefeated, and then they'd get eliminated in the first game in the state tournament. And that happened to us several times. But now, since they have the leagues, why, Virginia City has something...probably nobody'll ever beat their record.

Hughie Gallagher was in high school with us. He was a couple of years behind me, but he played basketball, and he was a good ball player. Hughie became a principal.

They had a big surprise party for Jake Lawlor when he was retiring, I guess. And they had it at the Elks Club, and everybody was up there giving speeches about Jake and everything. Funny thing they didn't even mention the Virginia City basketball team, his first championship team, and all the players were there. Isn't that something? Georgie Drysdale came up from Oakland; he lived in Oakland. The only one that wasn't there from the first team was Charlie Bogel, but he is back East. But Bill Marks was there, and I was there, and Norman Harris—he was on the team—he was there. Edward Colletti was there.

*Was Ty Cobb on that team?*

No. Ty was ahead of us. I don't know if Ty played basketball. His cousin Delbert Benner did. He was with us; he got out of here before I did. Ty got out a year before that; I think he got out in 1932.

I started working in the mines when I got out of high school in 1936. I worked in the mine in 1937 for a short time, about two months, but you were supposed to be 21 to work underground then. I couldn't get a social security card because I was too young, so I went to work for my sister, Helen, up in

Susanville, got a social security card, come back and went to work in the mine again.

I worked in the Dayton mine in Silver City, and I worked in the Keystone; that's where I first went to work. That's the one with the little red wooden gallows frame—the New York—is on the left. The next one right below it is the Keystone. I worked in there when they were sinking the shaft and putting in the drifts in there. And that was on the 180-foot level. That's when I got out of high school. They were running three drifts.

Later, then, I worked in the Dayton, underground down there. I worked in the New York; I worked for a little bit with a leaser in William Donovan's—that's where the open pit is. Then the old road used to go around a hill, and Donovan moved the road so he could open a pit in there. They done that in the 1940s. He built the road and moved it. The authorities allowed him to do it then, and he open-pitted in there.

Then I worked in the Yellow Jacket, and I worked in the Con. Chollar. That was all underground, and it was all in old workings. Then I was drafted in the army, I was working in the Yellow Jacket, and we were in a tunnel...drove a tunnel back. We were in old-timers' workings. Then I was drafted in August of 1942, that's when they released guys out of the army to go work in the mines—shortage of miners, see. That's where they're forcing everybody from gold and silver mining to go to some strategic work, see.

During that time the copper, tungsten, lead and zinc mines needed miners. There was a shortage of miners, because when they forced the gold miners to shut down, a lot of them miners went to the shipyards to work where they were making more money. They went where they could get the best pay and not be drafted. If you were in the shipyards, you didn't get drafted. They were building up

these merchant ships then. It was all necessary to the war effort, so they got preference; they weren't drafted out of there.

They used to have a 17-week boot training period in the service, and then they changed it to six weeks. I was one of the first in that six-week deal, and in six weeks, why, then the shortage of miners was evident and they furloughed me to go to work in the mines. In 1942 I went to work in the copper mines in Ruth over there for Kennecott Copper. Worked two and a half years. Then they called me back in 1945 to go back to the army. I took boot training again, and I was getting longevity pay. The instructors couldn't figure out why I should be getting longevity pay! [laughter] And here I was taking boot training. It didn't make sense.

Then in about October of 1945 I was sent to school; I was put in the Counter Intelligence Corps. They were trying to teach me Russian. I can't even pronounce the words, let alone learn anything! [laughter] And by this time, December 1945, I had enough points to get out.

I come back and started work in the mines again. In 1946 a friend, Joe Viani, come and said something about opening up a bar. He told me, "Get yourself a partner."

And I said, "If Eddie Colletti'll go with me," because we went through high school together, "If he'll go, all right."

So, I talked to him, and he was going to run for sheriff, and I said, "Well, run for sheriff anyway. If you get it, fine; if you don't, why, let's try it." So we tried it, and neither one of us knew how to mix a drink. But we learned, you know, the hard way. We opened up a bar called the Smokery Club at the present site of the Delta. We was there until 1958. We made a lot of changes in it.

I was the one that was instrumental in changing the name from the Smokery to the

Delta. Dominic Petrini and Joe Viani owned adjacent pieces of property, and this part was the restaurant; then it used to be the original Delta Saloon. Next to it was the Smokery Club, and that was just a big bar, you know—a saloon for miners. So I got Dominic and Joe to move the front out of the Delta up to where its present site is. Joe used to be in Hawthorne; he passed away. Dominic Petrini's son, Angelo, now runs the Delta.

I was partners with Dominic, Joe and Eddie Colletti. Colletti used to be the justice of the peace. Joe and Dominic owned the property together, and they had a third of the business. Eddie and I each had a third of the business. We were in there 13 years, and then we sold out to Dominic. In the meantime I bought the bank building up on C and Taylor streets—the Agency Bank of California used to be that building—bought it from the Kendall family after Hr. Kendall died, and I put the Sharon House in upstairs in 1956. [See note later in text.] I left there in 1964 and got the old golf course in Carson City and ran that for eight years, and haven't done nothing since! [laughter] Since 1972 I've been loafing. I've been lucky, I guess—fortunate.

*Why did you decide to get out of the Delta?*

Eddie and I sold that to Dominic Petrini, Angelo's father. He wasn't doing anything, and he and Joe Viani owned the property, see. And at that time, I think, Eddie and I were kind of burned out—we'd been in there so long. And you know, just little things...I guess we were putting in too many hours. You put in 7 days a week, you work 12, 16 hours a day; why, after 12 years, I guess we were entitled to let up a little bit. [laughter] You get a little edgy, and a lot of little things bother you that normally wouldn't, so we decided the best thing to do is get out while

we were still good friends, which we are. And so that took care of that.

Then in 1972 I sold the golf course. I had two partners; we sold that. And I haven't done anything since. I learned to be a nurse, I guess. My mother got ill, and I helped take care of her for a long time while she was still around. And then my wife got ill, and so I'm still doing the same thing...just one of those things.

*You owned quite a bit of property in Virginia City at one time or another, didn't you?*

Oh, I had my house and the building there, a little place in Gold Hill and a few mining claims. Sold some of them. I had I think seven...they were pretty good claims. As a matter of fact, James Fair was owner of this mine at one time. And it had one stope down there that they took out a million dollars in it—the Million Dollar Stope, they call it. He took everybody down there and threw a big party underground. That was in the Occidental mine, and I used to have that one, too. I got it in the late 1960s. A friend of mine's father owned it. He was going to lose it, and they were putting it up for sale for taxes for the county. It reverted to the county, and I put in a bid on it, and I got it—quite a fortune.

I was on the county commission in 1947 and 1948. Two years, one term; that was enough! [laughter]

*Why did you decide to run for county commission?*

Well, I was talked into it. Come out of the service, and the old-timers were getting tired of being up there; thought it was time to let the young guys in, I guess. I tried. Wasn't too successful. [laughter]

I done it the way I thought it was supposed to be done. I was instrumental in closing down prostitution in the county, and that didn't go over too good. I voted against it. We shut it down. It was legal, and then they had some bad incidents, a couple of murders, and so we abolished it. But then there was a lot of underhanded stuff known. That's when Joe Conforte built the place out on the river. If I had been there he'd never have got it done. There was nothing like that.

The chief of police once told me, "You can make a few bucks if you want to go along and vote this way for prostitution."

I says, "No, I'll stay the way I am."

And he says, "Well, I knew that."

At that time our D.A., who was Bobby Berry, was supposed to draw up an ordinance abolishing prostitution in the county. It was the request of the grand jury, and that's what the commissioners requested. Well, that's when we went out of office, and I don't think he ever drew up the ordinance to abolish it. So it never actually was abolished. That's when Conforte got a toehold, and evidently he must have reached some people, I think.

*That is interesting, because I have read in a couple of places that by the 1920s, when the town really started going downhill, all the houses of prostitution had disappeared.*

Oh, no. See, on D Street there must have been five or six houses right behind what they call now the Julia Bulette Saloon. All the way down that block, there was six or seven little houses there, and there are still three or four of them left. Gordon Lane owns one of them, I think. And a couple of them, they turned into homes. But they're still there.

*During the war, in 1942 or 1943, the federal government issued the directive that closed*



*all the houses of prostitution in Reno and anywhere that was within 50 miles of a military base. Did that affect Virginia City?*

Yes. I think they were closed at that time, too. Then when we came back after the war, they reopened, because then it was up to the counties. [There is conflicting testimony about whether or not prostitution continued in Virginia City during World War II.—Ed.] Now, Reno, their red light district was still closed. Carson City used to have a red light district, too. I think theirs opened after the war, too. But it was strictly up to the counties.

As long as prostitution was open, we were the first ones at that time to license the houses, because we felt we could control them better. They couldn't have any men affiliated with them, and we could pull their license any time we wanted. And it was a means where the women had to be inspected all the time. They had to have their tests taken. It was just a matter of keeping control on it.

In the 1920s it was rare that you would see a woman in a bar. Then they started coming in the 1930s after Prohibition and during that time. There are some ordinances up there, I think, still on the books—I don't think they've ever been removed—where a woman wasn't allowed in a bar. The only ones that were allowed in the bars were the prostitutes, and that had to be after midnight.

In 1947 this one guy, Tony Harvey, had some girls up there. He didn't live there, but he had a home up there, see? And a young woman, I think from Stockton, was supposed to have come up here with him. A woman called the sheriff and reported her daughter missing. Tony and this girl came up here together; they were supposed to get married, and I guess he had turned her out and nobody knew it, see. And then when they had a falling out, he killed her and buried her in this

basement in the house. He claimed that she took off with somebody and went to Mexico. That's the story the sheriff and her mother got.

All right, there's a guy who still lives there—I hate to mention his name because he's still up there—but he started going down to the red light district. By then Tony Harvey evidently was married to one of the women that was working down there. This guy was going down there to Harvey's and he was seeing Harvey's wife while Harvey'd go to Stockton—that's where he was from. Harvey caught him once, and he warned him to stay away from his wife. She used to be on the line...was one of the working girls.

Harvey went to Stockton and called his wife. He told her he wouldn't be home for a couple of days. Harvey then got into his car and returned to Virginia City. Returning to his home, he found the guy he had warned to stay away, lying on the couch. Harvey pulled his gun and shot the man through the stomach.

Kay, Harvey's wife, ran out of the front door. The man that was shot got out the back door and into the brush. Harvey, thinking he killed the man, returned to the house. He thought his wife went after the sheriff. Harvey went down into the basement and hanged himself. When they cut down the body they found a grave in the basement that contained a woman's body. It was the missing girl from Stockton.

A grand jury was called and recommended abolishing prostitution. Two commissioners voted to abolish and one refrained from voting. We recommended that the D.A. draft an ordinance abolishing prostitution in Storey County. It should have been followed through. But, I don't think they ever did follow through on it, because within the next two years Joe Conforte was operating down there at the Mustang Ranch. That's how it got going.



After I voted to abolish it, I wasn't too well liked by a lot of people in town, and I never had an enemy prior to that. After I voted to abolish prostitution there was quite a few of them that took shots at me—never to my face, but it always comes back. That's why I didn't want to run again, and then they talked me into it, and I got beat by 13 votes.

*Was prostitution making much of an economic contribution to the town?*

Oh, no. It was more of a headache than anything. But the way Conforte operated, he made a big business out of it so close to Reno. And he was making payoffs to Storey County officials, I'm sure, in order for him to be able to operate. I couldn't prove it, but otherwise I can't see how he got it going. They've had several grand juries since then, and abolishing prostitution has always been brought up, but it's never really been pushed.

### **VIRGINIA CITY PERSONALITIES**

Duncan Emrich, who later became curator of folklore at the Library of Congress, and his wife used to come to Virginia City in the late 1930s, early 1940s. Then he got a divorce, and I guess he got his divorce up there. He married his second wife in Virginia City. Every time they had a vacation, they'd come to Virginia City. Sometimes he'd go back to work, and his wife might stay there for two or three months—loved it. They were pretty good drinkers. He liked the straight Old Crow, 100 proof. A lot of people of them days drank the 100 proof stuff. We used to love to have it behind the bar all the time, and now you never hear of anybody calling for a shot of 100 proof whiskey.

Lucius Beebe drank Jack Daniels...the black label. That's all he wanted to drink.

Clegg, he was a scotch man. They all had their different tastes, I guess.

Well, Duncan Emrich was planning on getting the Territorial Enterprise, and he wanted to be like Mark Twain. He wanted to sit at a poker table in the back of the Delta, put his typewriter back there and put out the Territorial Enterprise. That was his dream. He loved Mark Twain, and he wanted to do stories about Mark Twain. As a matter of fact, Emrich wrote a hoax story like Mark Twain used to about a local there that had a bar; his name was Frank "Bronco" Lazzeri. He wrote a hoax story about Bronco being killed. You know, he had diabetes or something, crawled into a door for help, and a deer head fell off the wall, and he was pierced by the tines and killed. So he put the paper out with this here hoax story, and there was calls from all over the United States, because a lot of people knew Bronco, and they loved him. But it was just a hoax, see. At the end of the story he indicated it was a hoax story, but everybody took it for serious. And finally, when Bronco did die, he died from diabetes.

Now, Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg had moved to Carson City at that time. Beebe was coming into a huge inheritance and Nevada didn't have an inheritance tax, so he came for that reason—to establish residence. They were living in Carson, but they used to come up to Virginia City all the time; that's where they spent the most time. And we were talking and he was laughing at Duncan Emrich then. Duncan was telling about how he'd like to get the Territorial Enterprise.

At first Beebe thought Duncan was being kind of childish about it or something like that. Then I got talking to him and I showed him the growth figures that I'd seen for the last three or four years that Jack Greenhalgh had given me.

Greenhalgh worked for the highway department. He used to bring us a road count

of cars coming from Gold Hill up through Silver City, that way. They'd get a road count there every year, and they'd get one up the Geiger Grade every year. And for several years they showed me the increase in tourist traffic, because the town was dependent on tourists then; that's all there was up there. A little mining, but not too much. So he'd bring me the breakdown, the highway count and that, every year. The increase every year from Reno was between 5 and 10 percent in the traffic count. It was increasing that much. And from the Silver City side it was like maybe 4 to 7 percent coming from Route 50.

After Beebe saw the statistics, right away he and Clegg bought the paper. At that time it was called the Virginia City News. They bought it and I think it was being printed in Sparks. He bought the Virginia City News, and then they bought the building over there, named it the Territorial Enterprise.

Everybody says that Beebe was instrumental in the rebirth of the Comstock Lode. It was coming by itself; he might have speeded it up a little bit. But actually they didn't buy the Enterprise to help Virginia City. He bought it to promote himself, see, and that'd give him a secured residence. He had bought the home up there; they bought the business—they established the business. Now, that secured his residence from New York, so he wouldn't have to have a probate there in New York, which amounted to a lot of money. I heard one time that he would have had the interest in oil stock in Texas, and he had already gotten \$45,000 in dividends from his interest in it, and he was talking to the broker, and he says, "My God, don't send me any more money! I can't stand that!" You know, now that's a tough position to be in.

*Did Beebe and Clegg make the Delta their headquarters?*

At first there was the Brass Rail. Then they went to the Bucket of Blood. Beebe got into an argument with the owner of the Bucket of Blood. Then they came to the Delta, and they made that their headquarters, their drinking spot, from that time on; especially Beebe. Of course, Clegg, he'd go all over town, but Beebe, he brought the whole crew from the Enterprise at 5:00 every night. They'd all come to the Delta and have their cocktails for two or three hours, or whatever time. He was something.

Clegg had a Jaguar roadster. And Beebe, about 6 foot 4, 6 foot 5—a big man who weighed 260-270 pounds—always wore a Stetson with a flat top, one of those cowboy hats. You'd see him coming down Geiger Grade sometimes. He always had the dog with him—T-Bone Towser, a St. Bernard. He'd be in the seat, and the dog's head was above the windshield in the convertible! [laughter] The only time Beebe'd get in it was when the top was down in the summertime, and then his head was always above the windshield, too!

Then Beebe bought the railroad car, renamed it the Julia Bulette. He had it refurbished like the old railroad tycoons did their own private railroad cars. He would go on trips all over the United States. I'm not positive, but I think just to put it on the rails and go on a trip, he had to pay like a \$445 first-class fare just to have the car move, all the passengers they had. They still had to pay like first-class fare for the railroad cars, and that would be each one wherever they went. He took one trip all the way to New Orleans in it. They were gone for six weeks or two months, I think. But he refurbished it, and it was a beautiful car. They tried to do it original, and a lot of stuff in it came from Europe.

Beebe bought the old Piper home in Virginia City. The owners of the Piper's Opera House bought the home from the Connors

family. Mr. Connors used to take care of the opera house. I think he was related to a Zimmerman, who was part of the Pipers' descendants or something.

When we were kids in school up there, they didn't have a gym at that time. They used the Piper's opera House for their basketball games. And then in the summertime they'd have roller skating inside. They used to have prize fights every week in the late 1920s and 1930s. Dan Connors was custodian of the opera house then, and he owned the home up there. Well, he passed away, and his sons, I think, sold the house there or maybe Millie Byrne... she was the daughter of Dan Connors. I think they sold the property to Beebe and Clegg. That's when they remodeled and fixed it up pretty nice.

The main reason for Beebe's acquisitions in Virginia City was self-promotion. I could see what it was, because every little thing that he'd done you could see what he was doing. He wanted the paper to promote himself, to keep himself in the public eye after leaving the New York Herald, you see. After his inheritance, it didn't take them long to move. They went to Hillsborough or Burlingame, or whatever it was, down in California about 1960, and they sold the paper. Bob Richards ran it for a while, after they'd left. He was a very good writer. He could copy Beebe's style to a tee. Couldn't tell who wrote the editorials.

Beebe was always critical about everything, and he loved to stir up a lot of stuff—he was good at it. But Richards was just as good. One time they was going to fire Richards—Clegg was. Richards couldn't sell advertising. He was the manager of the paper, and when Beebe was gone or couldn't be around, he'd write the editorials. But he was supposed to sell advertising. And Richards wasn't the type of guy that could put the pressure on you and

try to sell you something. He asked you once, and if you weren't interested, he didn't ask you a second time. He was that way, and nothing was going to change him. Clegg come in one day, and he said, "I'm going to have to fire Richards."

I said, "Why? He's the best guy you've got on there."

They tried a lot of different editors that Clegg said they were going to hire. (I don't know if they call them editors—assistants or whatever.) First thing they done, they take them out and go to a bar, see how they stood up after drinking, and how they functioned the next day. When Beebe and Clegg left the Enterprise at 5:00, they went to a bar and they started having their cocktail hour. And if their new people couldn't stand up to their standards, why, they got rid of them; they didn't last long. And there were quite a few.

Richards was the only one to meet what they wanted, but he could not sell advertising. So then Clegg said, "Well, I'm going to fire him. He can't sell advertising; we have to have somebody...that's what the paper survives on—advertising, and he's not performing. I hate to lose him."

I says, "Well, why don't you hire Bob's wife, Liz? Put her on the payroll...let her do the selling of the advertising."

"My God, I never thought of that," Clegg says. "You're right." Because she could do it; she was kind of forward. She was outgoing; she would say anything, and she was pretty sharp. And by God, they put her to work in the office, and it was her job to sell advertising. He says, "I'll cut Bob's pay, and what I cut him, I'll give to her."

Bob Richards ran the paper himself for a while. He had a lot of talent. He was a good painter also—Richards was. He painted all those paintings in the Sharon House for me of Sharon, Stewart and Sutro, Graves

from the Graves castle and of Zeb Kendall smoking a cigar. Richards painted all of those for me just from photographs. He was a pretty nice guy.

*I heard in an interview that Jack Curran did with Liz Richards years ago, before she died, and in it she said that Beebe never liked Virginia City.*

Well, he wasn't liked, so that'd be understandable that he didn't like it. The natives are very independent. They don't care who you are or what you are, but they weren't used to having some of the gay population around then. They were the first ones that way up there, and the natives resented that.

And, I don't know.... Beebe and Clegg liked to control things—not so much Beebe; Clegg was worse. Like on the highway they put up signs all over—Territorial Enterprise, you know? They cut down trees, and a lot of the people there didn't like those trees cut. They could put signs in between them, but if a tree was in the way, they'd cut down two or three trees and put up a sign, and they never asked anybody. A lot of the people resented Beebe, and they didn't care how much money he had or who he was; they just never did accept him.

Beebe was always a gentleman around town. He was always nice; he was courteous to everybody. He'd come into the Delta and he was polite to the women; he was polite to everybody. Strangely, he didn't like children. I heard him make remarks—"You ought to take your little bastards out and kill them." [laughter] He thought more of his dog, T-Bone Towser, than he did children. And our bartender had four little boys. They used to come in there, and they'd get crying and screaming or something, and they'd come into the bar and see Dad, be there a few minutes, and Beebe'd say, "I ought to kill the little

bastards!" [laughter] But that was the worst you'd ever see him.

Every time Beebe would leave, he would tip his hat and say good night to everybody when he left the bar. He'd get to the door, and he'd turn around. He didn't know half the people in there, but he knew the bartenders and knew the gentleman that ran the games there—Len Haffey—and he'd turn around and say good night to all of us, and be very nice.

Clegg was a little bit different. Clegg roamed around town at night after they'd gone home. And so I think most of the dislike was more for Clegg than Beebe, actually.

Then another who came up there was Doug Moore. He was from the DuPont clan. The woman he was going to marry was there, and she came for a divorce, and they established residence. They lived at the Bonanza Inn. It was up on the top of the hill up there, and there was several people that were like boarders—roomers there. It was during the time that the divorce proceedings were going on, and Doug used to tend bar in there once in a while when it was a dinner house. Well, the woman he was going to marry fell for somebody else by the time her divorce was over, and she married this other guy. Doug was rejected, and he felt bad, and he gave up all women and joined Beebe and Clegg! [laughter] So that's strange, isn't it?

Doug used to gamble an awful lot. Once I remember he lost \$17,000 over a weekend playing the wheel down there at the old Bank Club in Reno. And Monday morning, when the banks opened in Wilmington, Delaware, there was an employee of the Bank Club there with the checks to put them through the bank. Before the president of the bank honored the checks, he got on the phone and got ahold of Doug, and he asked him what the hell he was doing because they were having to sell the

stock, and he was to the point where he was standing there blowing controlling interest for the DuPonts. His mother was a DuPont.

So then the family got on him. He had a chance to go to Florida and manage one of the DuPont plants down there. He had to leave Nevada—he had a choice—or he was going to be cut off. So then he went to Hillsborough, too...or Burlingame, wherever Beebe and them went. He never came back to Nevada much any more. He had to stay out, or he would have lost his allowance, and he wouldn't go to work. He was very well educated, but he wouldn't go to work. I don't know if he's still alive or not.

*Were there any others that you know of that came to establish residency and avoid inheritance taxes?*

Beebe's the only one that I could put my finger on that really done that. We had a lot of people that came up there and bought homes and that, but they still maintained their main residence someplace else. There was people from Carmel, California, came up and had homes up there. In the summertime they'd come to Virginia City and spend two or three months up there. There was several groups like that came up, but it was more because of Beebe. See, now, he brought people like that—people with means, people that were something. He did bring a lot of people to town.

There was a lot of people come just to see Beebe, you know? He was quite an impressive-looking guy. They didn't come for autographs or anything, but they just wanted to see Beebe and look at him. They read about him and heard about him and what kind of a person he was. He had two sides. A lot of people loved his writing because he was very competent; he was really good. But then others would

come and see an oddball because [laughter] we weren't used to that type of people at that time. It was unheard of; they weren't around. Matter of fact, when the mines were going, they wouldn't've lasted long in a town like Virginia City. So if you had those tendencies, you kept it behind closed doors and nobody knew about it, because if it became known people would be run out of town. They just didn't go for stuff like that then, like it is today. It's a lot of changes, I'll tell you. It's something else.

*The people like those who came up from Carmel and so on...did they buy places that were already there and restore them?*

Oh, yes. There was one home on B Street called the Blake house. This guy's name was Deacon Blake; he had three or four brothers, but Deacon, I think, was the last one. And he used to be a printer for the Virginia City News up there. Worked for the newspaper for years—he was an old-timer, could drink straight whiskey and stay up 48 hours and play poker, and go to work and come back and do the same. Tough old man, you couldn't believe it. Always wore a black suit, black string tie, black hat, and was just a real character. And three women from Cannel that lived together down there, they came up and they bought this Blake house.

Now, one of the women was like a chauffeur. Her name was Helen Heavey. She'd done the electrical work in the house, carpenter work, put in a fence made out of bricks with a post coming up where the gates were—wrought iron on top. she laid all the brick, done all the mortar work... really something. They loved to come up there, and had a beautiful garden. There was another woman that came with them. Her family were from Colorado and made a fortune in



mining, and she was wealthy. Her name was Virginia Jones. And the other one was Frances Hudgins, and she was very wealthy.

Virginia Jones always wore Levis and a plaid jacket or something and cowboy boots. And Helen Heavey always dressed that way, also—the one that was the chauffeur. And this Frances Hudgins always wore a dress. They were such polite, real nice people, but they were the odd characters together, you know! [laughter] And they were old; that time they had to be in their sixties.

Another fellow that came there and his wife, they're still up there now. Real nice people. They came, bought a home up there. I think she came from New York, and her husband was with Powers Cosmetics. They called him Old Fitzgerald. They put on makeup shows all over the country and had these Powers models that went around with them. Remember his beautiful women? He was the Powers representative, I think, for the Pacific Coast and Hawaii. He had a great job, but he was always gone. But his wife always stayed up there. They bought the big pink house in Gold Hill that sits up on the hill.

### POSTWAR CHANGES

They claim, now, the tourists spend \$10 million a year or something in Storey County or Virginia City. How much of that \$10 million goes to help the tax base for the county or the city? That \$10 million is spent in a few business places and a few commercialized, phony business operations. There've been some bad ones up there. Like this one museum: you enter the museum here; out here you exit into another building. It turns out to be another museum that's part of this one; you've got to pay to get out.

Virginia City increased the police force, they increased the fire department. Now,

they've got three, four trucks down there; it used to be they had one truck and one guy that stayed on duty—he slept there 24 hours a day. Now they've got three shifts, three or four trucks. I don't know how many on a shift—maybe one. Host of it's volunteer fire department. But they need this new equipment because of all the people coming in there. None of what the people spend goes to help this. This is the poor taxpayer who lives on the back streets that has to provide for that...or the mining companies. They need school buses now. They let them build Mark Twain Estates up there, Stagecoach; they let them go up to the Virginia Highlands out there—they've got people all over. Now, they're going to want police protection, fire protection. Where does the money come from?

Now they won't let the mining companies operate. They say, "Oh, we don't want the money that a payroll has generated. That's scum—the miners are roughnecks." They're ridiculous; that's the city payroll. Every month! They could've had a supermarket up there instead of people going to Reno or Carson to shop. They could've had a nice little mall maybe somewhere. They could've had American Flat; they could've let them bring trailers in. People live in trailers. Now, what's wrong with a trailer? They still pay taxes. And the people would spend their money there. If the kids are going to school there, and if you give them a chance to buy what they need, they would do it there. But they don't want to. Whatever payroll they had—those people were making \$400 or \$500 a week working down in that pit—they're making them spend their money in Carson or Reno.

The mining interests build new water tanks for their community; they offered to help with the school. Houston Company was going to help in more ways than one. But,



no, they'd rather have the \$10 million from the tourists instead of maybe a million or \$2 million a year from a tax base that would benefit everybody in the county, if they cooperated with the mining.

And already the damage is done in those mines. They did what they called "glory-holing" in the old days—that's when they caved in the ore bodies, took ore out through the surface and left a large hole. The start of the pit across from the Fourth Ward School was all caused from glory-holing; that was all done from previous mining. They caved it in, and they drew the ore from underneath, see, right to the surface in that area. So you already had a hole there. Same in Gold Hill. So now that the pit mining operation comes in and makes it a little bit bigger...what the hell? The damage has already been done.

The glory holes were created from the workings of the old-timers. See, when the shaft mines got close to the surface where it was good, well, then, they just caved the ground from the surface and let it cave in. It left a gaping hole on the surface. But when you go in from the top with a shovel and your trucks and that, that's what they call the open pit.

When they caved it, then you were getting your waste and keeping your ore. Now, it'd work great in something like over in Ely and Ruth where they have the big ore bodies. Copper lies in huge bodies maybe a mile square, a mile deep—who knows how deep it can run? It's a big body, so you can cave everything and still keep up the grade of your ore, where in these small mines up here the veins might run up to 30 feet wide, but they might be down to five feet. If you're caving a 50-foot area, then you dilute the good ore with the bad. That wasn't feasible in this area.

With the open pitting you can strip off your waste and keep your ore. You know, you

can strip off the waste right up to it. Get in with your shovels and equipment and move it fast, and it's volume. That's what they make their money on. You have a high volume and do it pretty reasonable. The biggest cost now is in their equipment. All those big Euclid trucks, they run \$100,000 to \$150,000 a truck or more than that, and they might have 20 or 30 of them. And same way with their shovels and their skip loaders and their loaders and all of that, you know.

All that equipment is so expensive, but that's why your tax based be so high. A 11 that rolling stock that these companies have, and the high cost of the taxes. It would just be a boon to somebody like Storey County, a small county like that. And you get \$1 million maybe, or \$500,000 in taxes every year just from one mining company. Can you imagine how many people in business in Virginia City don't pay anything like that? They're lucky if they get a couple hundred thousand from everybody in town. But one mining company could be \$500,000 or \$1 million a year, and they don't want them because it's going to spoil the appearance of the mountains—going to spoil our mountains. Like somebody says, "If you don't like it, you could live somewhere else," because the country still has to have those minerals.

You just stop and think about it. It would help them both ways. It could have helped the school system; it could have helped the police department; it could have helped everything. And for every piece of equipment they have—rolling equipment or those motors and those mills and that—you know, that's on a tax roll. Each piece is on there. You get taxed for all your personal property; they do, too—just so much more.

Plus, that Greiners Bend there, the old road to Gold Hill, it's settling. It's bad, and

the county can't maintain it—they've got to depend on the highway department to maintain it in the wintertime. Houston would have put in a new road for them where it would have been easier to maintain. The sun would have hit it more in the wintertime. You wouldn't have to fight that snow so much; Mother Nature would have taken care of it.

They could do so much to help the whole community by permitting mining to resume; plus kind of say thanks to these old mining companies that kept the town together, kept it surviving. It could have really been a ghost town if it hadn't been for those companies. The tourism didn't start until after the war, and they built all those places up there that are all phony—all those beautiful chandeliers—how long would that last in a bar in a mining camp? You know, that's ridiculous. They're just making a tourist trap out of it. People expect to see something, so they give them what they want. Tourists don't know what they want. But they all like antiques, so they give them...why, hell, there was nothing like that in a mining camp. [laughter] That's ridiculous!

In the 1930s those bars were just places for a miner to go in and sit and relax—you know, someplace to relax and eat. They'd have some card games; they would play pan or play pinochle or pool. They were all single men. If they had a bar, they could have a few drinks or whatever they wanted. So they spent their time in the bars. And there was no bars with all those beautiful chandeliers, all the pictures and all that. There was none of that. Heck, a good Saturday night, and all that'd be wiped out! [laughter] You know, miners worked hard, they lived hard—they're like pioneers. You take construction workers—same thing. If you're building a highway, well, you're sure going to have some rowdiness. But most of the time they're pretty good people. They pay their bills, and they work hard, and they play.

You know, if they get drunk, what the heck? In them days, there was no transportation; they couldn't go any place. You're stuck there all year. So what do you do? You've got to have a little relaxation somewhere.

Virginia City picked up after the war. People started traveling. They had money, and they all were antique bugs; everybody was hunting for antiques and stuff. That's why all the bars up there put in all those hanging lamps and whatever antiques they could get. They'd want people to come in, and they thought that was the West, but that wasn't. You know, the West was strictly bare bar. They'd have chairs for the miners to sit around in and a big potbellied stove where they could keep warm. Then came a couple of pool tables, pan table, poker table—tables like this [pounding table] would be in there, and payday nights they'd play cards. They'd play pan or poker, pinochle; a lot of them played cribbage.

Tourists would walk in to an authentic bar and say, "Oh, just a saloon, just a bar," and they'd keep right on going. That's the way the Smokery was when we got it. So then we moved the Delta front from next door into the Smokery Club, put the Delta front in, changed the name to the Delta, put the hanging lights in there, like it is now, and got antiques from all over. Then the people used to come in and spend an hour walking around looking at it, where prior to that they thought it was just another saloon; they'd keep going. When it was original, they didn't want to see it. When we put all that stuff in for them to look at, that's what people wanted to see. They didn't want to see an authentic mining camp. They had different ideas. So that's why Virginia City is a tourist trap.

Same as the program "Bonanza," see? They never filmed one segment up there of the big "Bonanza" television series. And there never was a Ponderosa Ranch at Lake Tahoe.

That's the most ridiculous thing that anybody ever heard of—to have the Ponderosa Ranch up in those mountains at Lake Tahoe. There never was one. And the scenes that they had at Virginia City were ridiculous. They never showed one mine up there that was like the Con. Virginia or any of them mines with the big gallows frame shaft or nothing like that. In all of the series they had, it was always the Ponderosa Ranch, and it always took them half an hour to ride from the Ponderosa Ranch to Virginia City. And on horseback that's a good day's ride!

But that series helped Virginia City a lot. It brought a lot of people up there. People from back East, from the Midwest, a lot of them have never seen the Rocky Mountains or anything, and don't know what a mountain is like. They think that's just the movies. If you come out of the flat lands, it's hard to imagine mountains like we have unless you'd seen them, you know. We went back to Wisconsin for a short time when I was a kid. And we'd go to a movie, it would show the mountains; I'd say, "Well, that's the way it looks where I live."

"Oh!" They couldn't believe it; they said, "No. There's nothing like that. They just have those things for movies." They couldn't visualize them like that, and there's quite a few of them felt that way. Our country is pretty beautiful.

*I saw in the newspapers mentions of movie companies that were filming in Virginia City in the 1940s.*

Well, there was a couple that did. They done one television program in the 1950s. A lot of it was shot in the Delta, and it was for the series they called "The Odyssey." It was different places all over the country, but they had one program in Virginia City. Charles

Collingwood narrated the thing. It was an hour show.

At that time we had quite a few acting clubs that came up there—acting schools—and they done shows. They put on one at the Opera House they called "The Romance in the Scarlet Gulch." It was like the old westerns, where they had the villain and all that. And those kids were learning to act. One of them was pretty good, had a good voice, good-looking kid. Later I seen him with Mae West and her body builders. She had five or six guys in her act with her then, all well built and that could sing, had a lot of talent.

*Why did those movie companies come to Virginia City? Do you think someone was out there promoting the town?*

I don't know. Well, this "Odyssey," I think it came just because of the history of Virginia City. They may have mentioned him, because he was there at the time. But, I think it was the history of the town that they were more interested in. They showed what it was and what it developed to at the present time. It was quite a show. And then "Bonanza"—I don't know what got that going. Maybe Don McBride [owner of Bucket of Blood Saloon—Ed.] had something to do with that; I don't know. It was just a good name for them, I guess. They sell their name.

*It looks like there was a lot of effort to start promoting the town right around 1946. The Chamber of Commerce formed....*

Well, they were starting a lot of things before the Chamber of Commerce. It never did click. A group of local residents and artists started a restoration program; it never did click. They done that two or three times. I don't know. I think Virginia City kind of

hated to see change coming, see what was happening to the town. That's when the old-timers were still around. Now all the oldtimers are gone. Now it changes so fast you can't believe it. I don't know anybody up there unless I meet a few of the old-timers. And it's altogether different—a different town completely. It's not the great old mining camp that it used to be.

I think there's quite a few who feel the way I do about it, but there's a lot of them that have changed, you know. That surprised me—that their families, and even some my age, are opposed to mining. They grew up; they worked in the mills and that themselves, and that was their only livelihood. But now they've taken on this new idea that everybody has. They're forgetting about the past; everything is "now." They forget where they came from, what things were like. I've got several friends that I grew up with who are opposed to the mining, and I never could understand it. And still if I talk to them, why, they would kind of agree with me.

I think that there's not many old-timers left. I would kind of consider myself one of them, but there's not too many left up there. Of all of the people that I grew up with, there might not be 50 in a town, out of 600. They're pretty much in the minority. I know the people who have the Bucket of Blood, the Delta, Crystal Bar, the Ponderosa—that's about it that I know. Everybody else is new to the town. Well, I'll tell you somethinmy granddaughter graduated, and I only know one other boy that graduated with her out of a class of 16. I didn't know anybody else. so, it's just changing, that's all. Modern times are catching up with a beautiful, old town! Note to p. 105: Upon review of the final script, Mr. Zalac added the following clarification about his ownership of the Sharon House:

I bought the bank building in 1954. I put the Sharon House restaurant in it in 1956 and then leased it to Clint Andreasen and Iola Hart. In 1959 I took over the Sharon House myself. I leased the food part to Lynn Leong, but I kept the bar. In 1964 I leased the bar and restaurant to Mr. Leong, who still runs the Sharon House.



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MILDRED E. GIUFFRA**MEMORIES OF VIRGINIA CITY IN THE 1940S**

Mildred Giuffra: I first came to Virginia City in 1945, because I married a man who was from Virginia City. My first husband, Jack Murry, was in the army in southern California and I met him down there. We were married and moved to Virginia City.

Jack's mother, Agnes Carey, was born in Virginia City. She was the type of person that would have enjoyed herself regardless where she lived. She went to school here, but I don't think she graduated from high school. Her parents wanted to take her out of school and put her in a school someplace in California—Grass Valley sounds right. I think it was a Catholic school and she was a music student. She used to play the organ. Agnes married John Murry, and they had seven children. She really didn't have an easy life after she married. He drank himself to death.

*Kathryn Totton: Do you know how she supported the children after he died?*

Some of the older boys were working, and that's how they got by. When they grew up they all went to work here in town. Jack worked in George Wilson's grocery store, and his brothers Leonard and Jim did odd jobs. I never knew them to work very steady. They never did have much. They didn't do too well, I guess. It was such a large family; they struggled quite a bit.

*What did you think of Virginia City when you first arrived?*

Oh, honey, don't ask that! Before I even got here I was ready to turn around and go back. When you see Virginia City from out there that was it. I came by automobile up the Geiger Grade road. I thought that was pretty... till you got to see that wretched town right out in front of you. That was pretty scary. It was pretty much of a shock, because I was used to a city—not like New York or Chicago, but a city nevertheless, where you didn't have open sewers and your water didn't freeze. It was a



ghost town then—too rural for me; one like you never even saw in the movies because this is for real, and it's unbelievable. It was shocking. Oh, my God I can't...my description fails me. I can't even think of adjectives that would describe my feelings. Desolation.

Well, this was my view from out there. Jack said, "Do you want to take a run around town?"

I said, "No, thank you very much. I don't want to see any more of this. That's it. I've had it. Let's go back." Well, we didn't go back.

*When you came in 1945, what were most people doing for a living?*

Nothing. There wasn't anything going on here. A lot of people went to Hawthorne, and a whole lot from Virginia City went down to California and worked in the airplane factory during World War II. Most of the boys John's age went into the service. So, Virginia City was depleted. It was in pretty bad shape, pretty bad shape.

There was a grocery store and a post office and a couple of bars and a restaurant. During World War II there was only about half a dozen people working in this town. There were people at the courthouse; the courthouse and the post office always stayed open. They didn't have a gas station until the boys came back from the war. All these old buildings were covered with dust and cobwebs. A lot of them had the iron doors still shut. You could have bought any building in town for \$500, and the smart people did. [laughter] Some of the buildings went for taxes.

*With whom did you live when you first came to Virginia City?*

Next door with Jack's mother, Aggie, for about two months until we bought this house

for \$37 in taxes. The people moved back to New England, where they came from, when the war closed mining down. Then I bought this lot on the north side of the house for \$35. It did not look like this, but that's what we paid for it in October, 1945. You could buy a large lot for \$35. Virginia City was really run down.

*What was this house like?*

Well, that's unbelievable, too. Jack's brothers bought this house to tear it down for firewood, so it wasn't much. It was practically 25 by 25 feet. We've done much renovation. At three different times we've done a lot of construction work. [laughter] There wasn't any electricity or indoor plumbing. It was just walls, and the outside walls were boxcars. There was as much as a 4-inch difference in the siding at many places. That's why the stucco is on it—the only thing you could put on it that would make it even. But it's a good insulation. It worked fine. Oh, things weren't that bad. We had a gas furnace in there and we had that cute little stove there, where the bricks are, a little wood and coal stove.

Our water never froze. Of course, sometimes the water that comes into town would freeze. I mean if you take care of things it doesn't matter how you do it. Newspapers are a great insulator. I had little plastic shunts running across the kitchen and all the way down into the sink for when the roof leaked. No sweat. You can do a lot of stuff when you want to.

*There did you do your shopping? There did you buy your groceries?*

Then I first came here there was a grocery store; there still is. There always has been a grocery store, so you could get what you wanted.

*Was it common to go into Reno or to Carson City to get things then?*

We didn't go that often, but if you had to you could go. It's not that far. But I don't remember making weekly trips like I do now. We do all our shopping in Carson City now. The Virginia City grocery stores now do not carry enough food for us to live here, to cook what we want to cook. They just don't stock that kind of thing, and they cater more to the tourists. It's a sandwich trade and that type of thing. They have boxed things and dog food and toilet paper and Kleenex and nuts, bolts, screws and oil, but not mostly the things that you would want to cook a meal with. It's just not a well-stocked store. And then they charge you three prices. If you paid 15 cents for an orange in Carson it'll be 35 cents up here.

*That did your first husband do when you came back to Virginia City? That was his occupation?*

We went into gold mining. [laughter] Big deal.

*Was there a name for this gold mining operation?*

Yes. The Lizard mine. Somebody had mined in there before; Jack leased it. They got the stamp mill running, but it needed much repair. He had a good helper who built the stamps. This smart, capable guy could do anything. That's the kind of guy you need when you're in the mining business, because he got those stamps working. I'll never forget the thrill of the first day I spent listening to how hard it would bang. Oh, it was wonderful. [laughter]

*How long did it take you to get the Lizard mine into operation?*

Oh, it must have been about three or four months. I think the stamp mill was good, but it wasn't running and there were many, many parts that were missing. I know there was this big Fairbanks Morse steam engine, and we had to send back East to get parts for that engine. Sometimes the parts would come and they weren't just right, so you'd hone them down to get a fit.

The men worked like mules, but they were really good to me. They appreciated their good food. We had a great big metal barrel outside the kitchen window they'd put water in and put the pipe on it. It ran through the kitchen window, and I had running water! [laughter] We had a two-holer outhouse out in back, and the very end was channeled all the way out there. We used it at least six months, because it got too cold and what water you had would freeze; you had to have water to run the shaker tables.

When the stamps crush the ore in the mill, then it comes out down at the bottom and it runs on a table that they call a shaker table. It vibrates and it's huge, and it has what they call "riffles" along the sides. You have a long piece, like a piece of molding, and then the next piece would be a little bit shorter and as you go across they get shorter. There's running water through here, and these things shake back and forth. When you get to the bottom of the table, you have less than what you started out with! And then you took this gritty stuff and sent it to the assayer in Salt Lake City, and then they sent it back.

For a long time I had lots of fairly decent nuggets—BB size and a little bigger, the top of a match head. I don't have any anymore. But most of this stuff is invisible—so fine that you don't see it. It's called fines. You don't have any idea what's there until it's assayed. In those days if gold ran \$25, \$30 a ton, which this did, it was pretty doggone good, because they were

only paying \$5. Now at \$340 or \$350, it would make a difference.

Today people are coming in and picking up a lot of the tailings, because if they are smart and good enough and know what they're doing, they can probably make some money. But they haven't yet. They haven't proved to me that they make any money. They put up some pretty fancy mills and they haven't been able to keep them going here.

*I've read that in the 1940s and the 1950s they had gone from shaft mining to open-pit mining in Virginia City. How did people feel about it then?*

There weren't as many new people here. There were old-timers who still more or less had an idea; if they mine they mine, and most of them worked in mining, and so we didn't bellow too much. But it's different now—a lot different. The old-timers are very few. The open pit miners come in and they dig a great big hole and then they go off and leave. It's a lot different than the tunnels and shafts, which weren't an eyesore.

*And you worked in mining, too?*

Yes. I guess that just about everybody that could work worked in mining.

*I read in the newspapers that around 1946 they were lamenting the fact that they couldn't get any miners in Virginia City. They weren't coming back from the war.*

Yes. During World War II Bill Donovan was forced out of running the mill because the government banned any mining. That's the mill south of Silver City on the left-hand side. But then after Donovan reopened the mine, with the prices and the wages and those

sort of things, he just couldn't keep it going. But he really did try. They just couldn't grind the rock and they really did try, because they had the little stamp mill inside there too. Now that was a little stamp mill; it wasn't just the little stamps, but there was a battery of them. Ours were big stamps. I would say they were 8 or 10 stamps, but Gladdie and Bill Donovan's mill had only 8 or 10 stamps in each battery.

*Did you say you were mining six months—just the one time?*

Yes, we spent all our available money. [laughter] And then we had to go to work.

*Did you make a profit from the mining?*

No! We never sold one ounce of gold. All the stuff that looked good, we kept just for friends. We didn't make a dime. Not that I know of.

*That did you do with the claim, the equipment and the house?*

Oh, it just sat there and every year we'd have to do assessment work and write down at the courthouse what we did. We always went out and did that. And then after Jack died, I guess we didn't do it. Then somebody can come in and take over the claim when you don't do the assessment work. But it was exciting while it lasted—different.

It was hard for a city girl out in the boonies—oh, my God. I was not a boonie girl, but I learned how. I learned to cook and bake on my great big, old wood and coal range. That wasn't here though. We had to go down the Six-Mile Canyon and across the desert flats about 15 miles and pick up Highway 50 that way and then out through Dayton. It must have been five miles back off of Highway 50,

southeast of Dayton. It seemed like it was 100 miles away.

The house I lived in was a beauty compared with this. That was a two-story lovely house with great big glass windows, and we had oil heat. We had rugs on the floor. We had a Victrola that you wound up and played records on. Oh, we had all the comforts of home. It was kind of fun after you got used to it.

Jack and I had horses, and we used to ride quite a bit. Most of them were mustangs that they caught up north. There's a corral maybe half a mile from here also down Six-Mile Canyon. He had a large corral, barn and pasture.

Then I came here there were lots of wild horses that came right into our yard, and they had done that for years before we came. George Wilson and Doc [F. W. Hodgins] and anybody else that had a horse just let them run loose. That was great. They always came back if they knew where the hay was. But a lot of them would stay out in the range for months and months and then you'd go out if you had like 8 or 10 that were in a group; they would mostly stay together when they knew each other. And then they had what they called a "bell mare." One of the mares would have a bell on it, and the horses would stay with that sound.

*Would they go out and round them up every now and then?*

Yes, they did! Especially the young ones, and then they'd brand them.

*Did you have to help with that?*

Yes. You'd get them halter broke so that when you'd walk up to them the next time they wouldn't be so spooky. I had ridden a

few horses in my time, but not enough to brag about! [laughter] But I never rode a western saddle and I never rode these cowboy ponies, but you learn all that stuff. It was fun. I was just a kid. I was only about 30 years old. I enjoyed most of it, I really did, after I got over the shock of the town.

Jack and I bought the old Virginia & Truckee freight depot on E Street in the early 1950s. We planned to have a museum and to probably use some of the carts with horses for rides. There was a stagecoach, too. We were going to have rides and then have the depot as a museum.

There were old surreys; there were shays; there were sleighs and buggies. There were breaking carts—that's the little two-wheeled cart that they use when they harness a horse that has never been driven before. It's a heavy, heavy cart, that if the horses kick back, they can't hurt it or themselves. There were tons and tons of tack; we had specimens, and lots of wagon wheels, and we had a bunch of those little metal spikes that the miners used to poke in the walls and put a candle in. We had old tools and a complete blacksmith outfit. We had many of those tools; they were quite a collection. It would have worked, I think, if Jack and I had planned to stay with it. But Jack got sick and died in 1959.

*What did you do with the equipment?*

Nothing until John Giuffra and I were married in the 1960s. The only thing I sold right after Jack's death was the stock and the big truck.

*What about the depot itself?*

No. John and I sold the whole thing in one great big lot. Somebody from California came in and bought the whole thing. In front of the

depot there used to be a passenger depot, a smaller building and a big car shed, but that's all gone. They destroyed so many buildings for salvage. The passenger depot was a beautiful building. It must have been torn down in 1938 or 1939 when they took the V & T Railroad line out of here, I think. When they disbanded this part of the V & T, they no longer came up here, but they still had their run from Minden to Reno, and they kept that until after I came.

*Yes. The last run to Reno was made in 1948.*

Oh, I think that one of the first things that ever happened to me when I moved here and I always thought was funny concerned Robert Berry, a Virginia City boy who was district attorney. One morning I'm walking up D street and there was prostitutes just about a block up the street and Hr. Berry stopped me and said, "Do you know where you are?"

I said, "Yes. I know where I am."

"Do you know who lives over there?"

I said, "Yes. They're not going to hurt me!" He was real shocked at that smart aleck lady and said, "I'm not letting my wife walk up D Street!" [laughter]

*I have read that by the 1920s the houses of prostitution in Virginia City were gone.*

No. There was one right up here on the corner when I moved here. Well, Lucius Beebe's books wrote about the girls that were up here. During Lucius's career, after World War II, they were having a big argument about just where they were going to build this new school, because it was too close to the girls. So Lucius said, "Move the school." [laughter] So they were there.

There was a black madam, Gertha Jamar. The prostitutes were friendly, nice girls. They

never hurt anybody, for Pete's sake. Of course, I'm broad-minded. It didn't bother me.

*How many houses were there?*

There were two houses when I came in 1945. Now there aren't any girls here at all. They are all down at Mustang—they're all gone. The houses were small and they had to have a living room, and all those little houses only had two bedrooms, so there couldn't have been more than two or three girls in each house. But Gertha was the madam and a very nice lady. If you got in trouble, she'd help you out. You could always go to Gertha for a buck.

*You accepted her and you say you knew her well, but how did the rest of the community feel about that? Do you have any idea?*

I don't know. The prostitutes never went up town. They just stayed right there on that street. They didn't mingle. There isn't another side of D Street when you get in that area, so they weren't really around anybody else. On this side of the street where that was there was a great big coal yard, and there wasn't anybody there. But nobody could come up there, nobody could see, and they even had a fence there. There's a great big embankment there, and there weren't any houses north of them; there weren't any houses east or south of them. Then this way north there was the big coal yard, so they weren't really exposed to other people. They would have had to go out of their way to get in contact with us. I never saw them at this end of town ever.

Sometimes people would knock on the door. We had lots of knocks on the door. One time I thought it would be fun to have a red light out there for a porch light. Jack almost died. [laughter] You didn't even turn on your



porch light. It didn't matter what the hour was. [laughter] That's funny.

*Is Gertha still living?*

I don't know. She was older than we were—she was older than Jack. She was 50, and I've been here 40 years, so she would be 90. I doubt very much.

*When did Gertha leave Virginia City, do you know?*

I imagine it was a couple years after those prostitution ordinances came in—maybe 1946, 1947, or 1948. I'm not sure, but it wasn't too long after I came that the county moved the prostitutes, or they moved themselves with the county ordinance. [Gertha Jamar is listed as a registered voter in Storey County as of October 1948.—Ed.] At that time if the counties wanted prostitution they could have it. I think they voted that they could be at this certain place near the Washoe County/Storey County line, and that's where they still are. I don't think they were ever at any other place in Virginia City except there. Even early they had that same address.

*Oh, yes, back to the 1860s.*

I went to work for Dr. Fred Anderson in Reno in the early 1950s. Of course, back in those days he was the up-and-coming surgeon in Reno—the big shot, a wonderful man, just wonderful. He was a very intelligent man—a Rhodes scholar, and he was an excellent surgeon.

Jack went to work as a guard at the Nevada State Prison in Carson City. Then we got rich fast with both of us working. [laughter] That's when we put the addition on the house.

*How did you commute daily?*

With an automobile. I had a car. No trouble.

*How long did that take you?*

About as long as it took you to come here! [laughter] Leaving here and to get my car parked, I probably gave myself maybe 45 minutes, unless it was wintertime. In 1951 and 1952 it snowed so hard out here on Geiger Grade there were three days nobody got out of Virginia City, and then they opened the way first and I went by way of Dayton and to Fernley and Sparks into work. Dr. Anderson said, "Boy, you really wanted to come to work bad, didn't you?" [laughter] And then I stayed in Reno until they got the road dug out. They didn't have the equipment to keep the roads open; when you get a blizzard up here in Virginia City you can move 10 feet and turn around and the 10 feet where you hauled out the snow, it's back already. It's really bad. Now with the big snow blowers, why, they can clear that in nothing flat. They make such a big swath through there that the snow can't fill in by the time the blowers get back. It can be a real bugger, but most of the time Geiger Grade is easier to go through than Washoe Valley, where the snow really blows across there like crazy and you can't see.

*Who were some of the people who came to Virginia City from the 1940s to the 1960s?*

Dick Walton, the artist, and Florence Edwards who owned the Silver Dollar Hotel came. Florence was a character if there ever was one—a smart lady. She was a cruise director for years, and she had been everywhere. She knew everybody and had a



very pronounced Boston accent. She was just a little squirt, kind of tubby. She'd stand up to anybody 6 to 8 feet tall—it didn't matter to Florence—and tell them off. [laughter] But if she liked you you were in! Florence Edwards came in 1945. I think she retired from her job, and she was looking for something to do. She came for a visit, the Silver Dollar Hotel caught her eye, and she bought it.

*I understand that there were artists coming to Virginia City during the 1940s. I found a reference to someone who wanted to start an artist's colony in the old Black building.*

Cal and Mae Bromund were in the Black building. He was doing watchmaking and working with jewelry. They did come in here at that time and they had their little shop up for maybe a year, a year and a half. Cal painted in his home, and then people caught onto Cal's beautiful works and he started doing pretty good and he gave up the watchmaking business and just stuck to painting. I have one of his originals, and he did beautiful work. Cal Bromund made a living. The rest of them didn't,

Dick Walton came about that time. He's the artist who's done the big artwork down in the Federal Building in Reno.

*Why did they choose Virginia City?*

Cheap! They could get a good place to live cheap. There were a lot of good houses here. There weren't anybody living in them. They could rent the Black building for probably \$20 a month. [laughter]

There has always been some artsy-craftsy people in the old California bank building. There's people in there right now. But most of the time that's been occupied by artists. It's not generally working artists; it's just artists who

show and people whose artwork is for sale. I've never run into anybody down there that painted. Maybe some of them do.

They have this summer thing for artists at the old hospital. You see them around town doing different things. That has hung on longer than anything else. That's been going on since before Father Meinecke came in 1963, and they had just started fixing up that old building to make it livable enough to have somebody stay there. They stay about two weeks, and then another group comes in. They'll have people come in for oils, acrylics, watercolors or charcoals. They stay right in the hospital building; they pay so much money for a room, and they can do their own cooking there, and a lot of them do that. A lot of them have been coming to the Senior Center, too, so that's been successful. Louise Curran has a gallery in the basement of the Episcopal church. During the summer they have art on display from all over the state. It's impressive.

*I heard that during the 1960s there was also a Yoga colony in the canyon.*

Yes, that burned down. That was in the brewery that was over a hundred years old when it burned down.

*Tell me about the pasture you sold to the Yoga colony.*

That's a small canyon maybe a quarter of a mile wide, and there's a whole line of trees on the right-hand side that the Yogis planted. Then they bought the land across from them, which was our pasture, and they put up a little metal-frame canvas-covered meditation tents. They'd sit in there and meditate; that's why they're so calm and lovely. [laughter]

They were here at least 10 years. They invited us down, and they did so much work

to that old brewery—just beautiful work, and they had a school down there with lovely, velvet furniture and beautiful Oriental rugs. I mean it was gorgeous. Those people have all kinds of money, you know. And darling men—so sincere, sweet, quiet and Christ-like. They belonged to a Hawaii-based group, because that's where they went when they left here.

*Why did they leave?*

I think there were some people in town who gave them a bad time. They really weren't accepted in town, and they may have felt that. They weren't the type of people you saw every day. So I don't really know. But I know a lot of people harassed them, which is kind of a shame.

#### **LUCIUS BEEBE AND THE TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE**

*Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg came to Carson City around 1948. Why did they locate up here in Virginia City?*

They bought the newspaper, the Territorial Enterprise, in 1950, and they moved out about 1960. They decided it would be fun to have a daily paper. They were interested in history. Lucius was a historian, and he was just plain interested in the whole area. They got stuck here because they could put their private train down in Carson City, and if you're going to live there for a year, you might as well have rent that's not exorbitant. Even though you're a millionaire you still watch your pennies. In the time that they lived there, they came up here frequently, and they were just charmed by Virginia City. They knew about Mark Twain, and they thought it would be fun

to revive the Territorial Enterprise, so they started looking for a building, they contacted Roy Shetler, and it all fell in place. Their interest piqued the town. They didn't live here right in the beginning, either, until they really decided what they wanted to do—start that newspaper. That's really all it was was fun, and they didn't ever start that to make any money, because any money that they ever made they split up between all the people that worked there at the end of the year.

Beebe's house is up there above Piper's Opera House. That house was all run down and they had to stay down in Carson City until Vic Maxwell got it so they could at least live in it. He worked on it the whole time they ever lived here.

Vic Maxwell also helped build the Territorial Enterprise, that annex where the print shop was—it's a cement block building in the back. It's on D Street, but it's attached to the building on C Street.

*I heard that part of the reason Beebe came to Nevada was because of the favorable tax situation.*

I had never heard it, but I wouldn't be surprised. They had money, but why throw it away? I mean if he were going to throw money away, he'd have rather thrown it in the slot machines. He loved those slot machines. He had a big black and white checkered jacket. The checks were at least an inch in size, and it came up in the back and hung way down to his knees in front, because he had all these silver dollars in these pockets, and his pockets came clear down to his knees from all that weight. He always wore the black and white jacket and a big hat.

Lucius Beebe worked on the New York Times, was thrown out of Harvard and

finished at Yale because he was Peck's Bad Boy [a reference to a mischievous character created for a newspaper series by Milwaukee newsman George Dick in the late 1800s. The series, which appeared in the Milwaukee Sun, was later made into a popular play—Ed.]. He told us: "Don't ask me to screw in a screw, because I'll tell you a story now. My father told me this when I was a little kid. He looked out the upstairs window and yelled, "Lucius, put that wheelbarrow down! You know you're not mechanical." [laughter]

Chuck Clegg was really better at making the paper work than Lucius was.

*He always seems to be in the background.*

Yes, he was, but he was just a whole lot better at a lot of angles that Lucius wasn't. Lucius was the writer and would maybe think up these things, but he couldn't really get them in motion. It was Chuck who got the building together and who knew how to set up the circulation department. Now he went into all that stuff before they came up here. He went to other newspapers and found out how to do this, and your card indexes and then your reminder envelopes and supplies. You had your boxes of subscribers, and if your subscription would expire at a certain month you had a color for each month, and so all you had to do was look at it and pull out the right color. You still had to do the work, but it was very well planned. He knew what he was doing.

Now Lucius could have never done that part of it, and Chuck was about halfway mechanical, too. He knew a little bit about setting up a steam room, which they built in their Virginia City house. He read books and looked at steam rooms. He couldn't go in and put the pipes in, but he had an idea where they

came from and how it should look when it was finished. He could watch a workman and he knew whether or not that guy knew what he was doing. But that's where his mind was: much more technical. He was a good photographer, too. He thought he could write a little bit, but he really wasn't very good. [laughter]

Lucius Beebe was such an entertainer. God, he was funny! He could write—how he could write! He wrote so beautifully. But that's what came out of him. He could sit down and write you a 500-word essay in 10 minutes with the same beautiful speech. Oh, God, I remember that. He was funny. He would let you have it. He really tried to emulate Hark Twain. And he did! He brought up lots of crazy things that really didn't happen. The readers really got a kick out of that newspaper. Some of the letters that they'd write were hysterical—really funny. He didn't care what he said either. Most people took Lucius seriously if they didn't know him, and that's why most of the people in town were mad at him nine-tenths of the time, because they didn't understand him. [laughter]

Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg were really something else. They were friendly and had lots of parties at their house, but God, you had to get out early or you'd never make it home. Oh! And T-Bone Towser, their big Saint Bernard dog, was fed out of these great big bowl and pitcher sets. Towser's dish was an antique—nothing cheap. He went first class. T-Bone would come in their living room. They had this small living room with two chaises, a sofa and a coffee table. That's all you could get in there, and T-Bone would come in and be so glad to see you he'd wag his tail, and everything that was on the coffee table would be on the floor! [laughter] He'd just back right up and sit on the couch. That's where I got Lucius's idea: "Well, the dog sheds

so you buy dog-colored clothes in beige, in light cream—dog-colored clothes.”

Lucius got stopped once and he didn’t have a driver’s license in Nevada, so he had to go down and take a test. We all told him, “You better read the book.”

“I don’t have to read the book. I graduated from college! What do I need to read a book for?”

So he goes down. Of course, he didn’t pass the test! [laughter] So he came home and read the book and went down the next day and passed his test. [laughter]

*How many people were working for the Territorial Enterprise?*

There were two of us upstairs: Cece Andrews was the office manager. I know why Cece Andrews came. She had read Lucius’s writing when she lived in New York, and when she knew he came out here, she came to Virginia City and went to work on his newspaper.

Jim Turney worked there, and Ralph Pitzer ran the linotype. I was circulation manager and office nurse. [laughter] I had worked in an emergency room back in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in the 1930s.

*Were Beebe and Clegg advertising for a position?*

No. Vic Maxwell, who worked for them many years, was a friend of ours. Right about that time he was out here looking for somebody, because they started out small, and they only had one person in the office. It just got too big for somebody to handle the billing and the circulation and everything that was involved. They needed another person. Vic told the boys that he had a friend who worked

for Dr. Fred Anderson in Reno. That’s what really did it, the fact that they had an office nurse. God, that’s great. On the masthead: Office Nurse!

Then these people would come in from big cities and ask, “What in the hell do you need with an office nurse?”

“Well, she takes care of my hangovers, dummy!” [laughter]

We got lots of medical calls up there, and I was free to go at any time if somebody got in trouble up town or around town. They knew where I worked, and we nurses in this town in the early days were on call 24 hours a day! [laughter] There were only a couple of nurses here, so we did the best we could and that was it. It most of the people were really in trouble, you got them down to Carson City, but it wasn’t that far away. You had a lot faster transport than you do in a lot of big cities. With traffic conditions and the traffic lights we can get people down to Carson City in 15 minutes, no sweat. They have a good ambulance service here today. We also have excellent first-aid people. They keep up on what they’re supposed to know, and they take refresher courses all the time. They are good. I would rather have some of those guys up there that are good than some dumb doctors that I’ve seen.

*But in the 1940s and 1950s you were the only nurse in Virginia City?*

There were other girls in town—Margaret Marks; Georgie Hiddle was here when I first came. We never had a doctor from the time I was here. They’ve had a few physician’s helpers in the last maybe 10 years, but no doctors.

The two Katies [Katherine Hillyer and Katherine Best] were really characters in Virginia City, and they worked for the

Territorial Enterprise, too. They were bright girls. They both had fine educations, and the one came from a good family in Washington, D. C.; I don't know the other girl's background, but they weren't just scum. They drank too much, which is a downfall in about 90 percent of the people in Virginia City. But they were clever; they were intelligent; they were good writers. They wrote a cooking column in the Territorial Enterprise called "Vignettes," and they wrote a cookbook. [The Virginia City Cook Book written in 1953 by Helen Evan Brown, Philip S. Brown, Katherine Hillyer and Katherine Best, with an introduction by Lucius Beebe—Ed.] They were bright girls and funny people—hysterical. They could keep up with Lucius with all his jokes and stuff coming, and they'd just banter back and forth. I mean, it was like they were on stage.

I think they had the taste of booze before they came here, but I don't think that they drank to the extent that they did here. They'd go on picnics at the drop of the hat. They were good cooks. Anyplace, I mean, it didn't matter, somebody's backyard or down at the lookout and down Six-Mile Canyon. Good grief! But the first thing that went in the picnic basket was the bottle of booze. That was their downfall. I think they both died of what do you call that liver disease... cirrhosis? But why the Katies came here, I don't know. You couldn't help but like them.

*Did the Territorial Enterprise do offset printing?*

When you do offset printing, that needs photography, and you have to do "paste-up." You take a piece of paper and you take a typewriter and you write a column and you just paste it on a blank newspaper-size sheet. Then they take a picture of this whole thing and then run it through the press and it comes

out in printed form. All our newspapers are offset, and they're all paste-ups.

The print shop was in the back. There was a printer, a typesetter and a linotype operator. They would run an old Meallie press, which is one of the early presses—a big, noisy thing. They hand set everything and put it in a galley. They finally sent the paper over to Sparks and had it offset printed with the photography presses.

Lucius and Chuck ran the newspaper operation, and there were two divisions: the mechanical division where the actual printing of the newspaper was done, and Lucius wrote the editorials in the other part. Once a week, the day the paper came out, we'd have high school kids working for us, and we from upstairs would go down to help. We'd have about six to eight kids and three adults, and you'd have an addressing machine, you had the mail bags, and you had the kids taking the papers off the press and folding them in quarters. Then they would be fed from down here. The address machine was upstairs, and the papers were fed from down below. They would stack the papers up on the floor, and we'd reach over and stick them in the address machine. The kids would come in the day before after school and fold papers, and then the day of the mailing after school. We had extra help just then. We'd sell 3,000 copies uptown in one day. That printing you wouldn't believe. It was a tourist newspaper.

Lucius and Chuck would get on their train and take a cross-country trip, and we had ads from the biggest restaurants and hotels in the United States. The Sheraton hotels in New York, San Francisco, New Orleans and Chicago and other companies advertised in the Territorial Enterprise. The booze ads would kill you. Banks ran ads, because Beebe had first-hand friendships with these people. They couldn't turn him down. Sure,



what's a couple thousand more bucks in our advertising? That would be fun to have that in the Enterprise. The paper went to every state in the Union and a lot of foreign countries.

The Territorial Enterprise was audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) out of Chicago. They'd send auditors around to newspapers, and you'd have to prove every paper that you said you had a subscription for, and you had to prove your advertising. Any ABC-audited newspaper very proudly displays "ABC-audited" on the masthead or somewhere in the paper. That means a whole lot. Big newspapers are audited. Nobody ever heard of a little tiny paper like the Territorial Enterprise being ABC-audited. They're big shots, and it impressed the big newspapers and big advertisers. Antoine's and all those fancy places in New Orleans and the big hotels and restaurants in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, you mention it, advertised in the paper. They had Rolls-Royce ads in the Territorial Enterprise. They made a lot of money from these ads.

We employees all got pretty good bonuses, and Lucius and Chuck never wanted money. All they would have had to do is to pay it to Uncle Sam anyhow, so it was more fun doing it the other way. We'd have a big party, and everybody got a chunk!

*How was Beebe to work for?*

Wonderful! I never saw the man really teed off in my life until they sold the business—when he got teed off at Roy Shetler. And Lucius just said, "You can have it. You can keep it. I'm getting out of this town. Goodbye! Why fight about it? Just go. That's it. I've had it."

But I never saw him upset. Chuck would get mad. He would get madder than hell at Cece Andrews, Ralph Pitzer, Jimmy Turney

and all the hired help. He never got mad at me. Chuck and I were born on the same day. He wouldn't dare! [laughter] The whole thing was fun. It was fun. I've never had such a fun job in my whole life; I adored it.

Lucius Beebe had leased the newspaper building from Roy Shetler, and Shetler said, "Oh, you can't do that. If you leave, that's mine."

They had a big beef about that. That's the one time Lucius was mad, but, by God, Roy was right. It was right in his lease, that if Lucius left the newspaper, it was his. I think Lucius had been thinking of leaving, but what he wanted to do was more or less still have the paper under his tutelage and hire who he wanted to hire.

*I've read that Beebe and Clegg had a feud going with the Bucket of Blood Saloon.*

Yes. It was a whole bunch of crud they dug up. How much truth there is in it, I don't even know. They laid it on the line. Sometimes that type of thing was uncalled for, because some of us who worked for them were friends with these people and it was a little bit hard to take. It's too bad I didn't keep a diary, because that'd be so funny. Everything was funny. There wasn't any serious stuff.

*It seems as though some of the people around here took it very seriously.*

Lucius and Chuck really weren't that well liked in the town as a whole; that's the truth. Gays were not accepted like they are now. That was against them right there, and the fact that they had money was two counts against them. [laughter]

*Did you stay in touch with Beebe and Clegg after they left?*



Yes, on birthdays and Christmas. One time Liz Richards and I went to San Francisco for Liz's birthday coming up on the weekend, and I had told Chuck about it. He said, "Well, now, you go to the Palace Hotel for lunch on Saturday." So we did, and they had set this whole thing up in the Palm Room. Here we are, and the guys come back with all these damn carts with flaming stuff and the steaks Diane. You name it, we had it. And then at the end of the meal comes the waiter with the little cake with the candles on it singing "Happy Birthday," and there was a present for Liz. We were in hysterics, and everybody said, "Look at that! Who are these people getting all of this attention?" [laughter] It's stuff like that that was just right down their alley, if they could surprise somebody and pull something big. All they had to do was lift up the phone and it was so! They always stayed at the Sheraton Palace.

They had a beautiful home in Hillsborough, California, and we went to visit them there. That's where Lucius and Chuck died. Sad. Lucius only had one kidney when he came to Virginia City. For an intelligent man he really shouldn't have acted that way. Some dumbbell you could have forgiven, but he really killed himself with drinking.

When Roy Shetler took over we no longer had typesetters or linotypes, the press or anything else. Then Roy Shetler brought in some Jewish man from California, and he was going to run this newspaper. We all hated his guts and quit. It only took me 10 minutes to find out that I didn't like him and I could stay with that jackass. Bob Richards quit right on the spot, and I walked out after him. That was in September, 1962, I think. That was a sad day. Then they tried to keep it going after that. I think that after we all quit the little Jewish man didn't last more than a week. We weren't going to sit still for that. It just didn't work.

Oh, what we did! [laughter] What Bob did is we stole the mailing list. I did, I guess, or Bob did—one of us. We just simply stole the big rolls of mailing lists and we went up to his house and we took the run of the newspaper out of his house. That's when we were getting it printed over in Sparks; we did that for about a year, I guess.

Then Bob Richards came in and took over the editorial part of the paper when Lucius and Chuck moved to Hillsborough, California, after they left the paper. Bob emulated both Lucius Beebe and Mark Twain. People thought it was Lucius writing. Now, Bob Richards was a smart boy. He wasn't a college graduate, just smart. He was a sailor, and when he was on his sailing trips, before he left he'd go to a library and get a whole set of books on a subject. By the time he came back, he knew what that was all about. But it was all right there: a wonderful retentive brain. But there again, he was a drunk, which is a pity, because this town will ruin people.

*How did Bob Richards wind up in Virginia City?*

I think Bob had been here before, but one of his children had asthma and he and his family were told to get out of southern California, and having been here for a while, he thought he'd give it a whirl, and so he did. But he didn't work for the newspaper. He lived here for maybe four or five years. I think he did art work, ad work and sign work. He was good with signs, make up work, but it was strictly on his own. He never worked for any company that I know of. I think he and his wife, Liz, made a few bucks on their house that they sold down south; then his wife had some money of her own. They had three beautiful daughters.

*What did Liz Richards have to do with the paper?*

Liz came in when they fired Cece Andrews and took over her job. It was mostly billing, because we had lots of ads.

Bob Richards is the one that started the camel races, and that was just strictly a fun thing. The camel races started as a hoax. Richards said it would be fun if we did this and brought back a whole bunch of camels. Well, people read this and then he got kickbacks, letters and telephone calls. Are you really? Why not? Yes, let's do it! The first year we had only two camels and they were up in Jack Flanagan's front yard on the corner of A and Taylor Street. They rode these camels just for the pure hell of staying on them the first couple of years! [laughter] They didn't get anything out of it! [laughter] It grew from there, and now it's out of hand. I wouldn't care if I never saw another camel. The first couple of years they were fun, but it wasn't so commercialized as it is when you get a whole lot of money involved; then it isn't fun anymore.

#### **TOURISM CHANGES VIRGINIA CITY**

Paul Smith is the one that brought tourists to Virginia City, and if anybody else tells you it was somebody else, they're lying to you. He used to have a little card shop with souvenirs and stuff up in the old building next to the Bucket of Blood Saloon. He was the first person that got people to come in here, and he advertised the town a little bit by word of mouth. A lot of these guys that went into the navy and the army told all their buddies about Virginia City, so they all came to see what the heck it was like. That's when the tourist season started—after the war. This is my feeling how the whole

tourist trade in the United States got started; of course, Niagara Falls always had tourists, but no one ever heard of little bitty places like Virginia City.

Tourism is what brought Virginia City back after the war. It wasn't anything else. The Delta Bar and the Bucket of Blood were always there. The Crystal Bar, the '62 and "Bronco" Lazerri's bar were there—there were about six or seven bars after the war. Now there's more than 20 bars. There used to be one person in all the offices up at the courthouse. There was a clerk, and there was a recorder, a sheriff, and that was it. They did everything. Now there's five or six people in all of the offices; they really have grown.

I think Lucius Beebe and Chuck Clegg were probably the big movers after Paul Smith came. Roy Shetler also came in the early 1950s. He made a fortune in a hurry, because he was smart enough to latch onto a couple of those old buildings up there. He's the one that started the trash—he trashed our town with the rotten, gimmicky stuff and many of those off-color souvenirs and stuff. Many years ago that was definitely frowned on. It was just crud. There are beautiful shops, of course, and that saves the town. But he made a million bucks on it. He couldn't keep those little boxes coming fast enough. Roy Shetler owned the Enterprise building and the one across the street where the Roos Brothers were in the early days.

I learned to really love Virginia City, but I don't like it anymore. I don't like uptown anymore—what they've done to it. We don't enjoy going uptown. We like to live here! The uptown doesn't bother us here. I don't go up there, and most people like John and myself feel the same way—we old-timers don't like what some places sell. Maybe the old-timers that are making \$17,000 bucks a day might like it, but I don't.

*[laughter] You got to Virginia City just about the time that the town was starting to change. Did you ever think about moving down out of Virginia City?*

No, not after I went through all this stuff. Neither one of my husbands wanted to live anyplace but Virginia City. For the past few years, at least twice a week, I tell John I'm moving, and I haven't moved yet. But last time John said, "OK, I'll help you pack." And he had never said that before.

*I ran across a quote somewhere that said Virginia City in the 1950s had a lot more class. Now how does that strike you?*

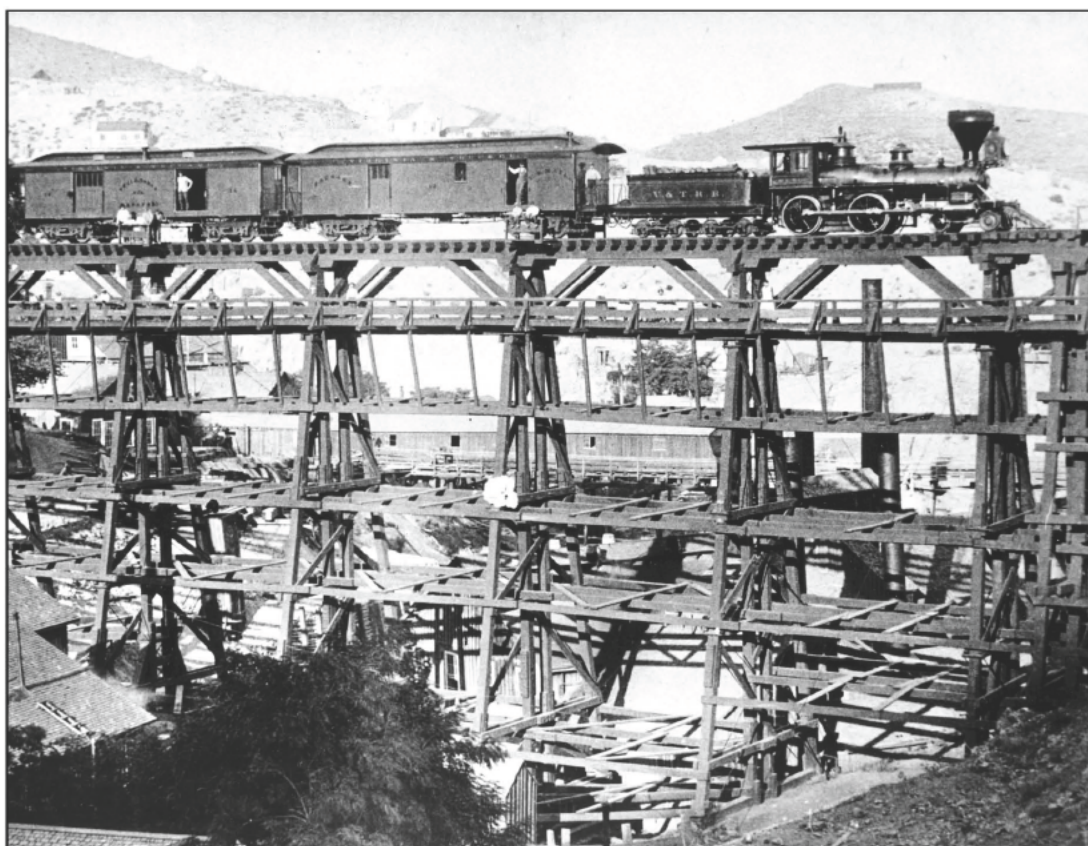
I never saw it. I wonder what kind of class they were talking about? They didn't say first-class, did they? *[laughter]*

*No. They just said it had a lot more class.*

Not that I know of. I have no idea what they had in mind. We used to have a movie house here. Isn't that what they call classy? *[laughter]*.

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## PHOTOGRAPHS



View of Crown Point Trestle and the Virginia and Truckee train crossing the ravine at Gold Hill, ca. 1870s. (Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Library)





"Sporting Row," the red light district on West D Street, Virginia City, 1924.  
(Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Library)



Arizona-Comstock mill, adjacent to the dump from the adandoned Hale & Norcross mine, Virginia City, ca. 1930. (Courtesy of Nevada State Historical Society)



Open pit mining operations on South C Street, with Fourth Ward School in background, Virginia City, ca. 1934. (Courtesy of Nevada State Historical Society)





Looking north up C Street, Virginia City, ca. 1940.  
(Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Library)



Charles Clegg (l), and Lucius Beebe (r),  
who revived the Territorial Enterprise in 1952,  
shown with Beebe's dog, T-Bone Towser, ca. 1950s.  
(Courtesy of Nevada State Historical Society)



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## ORIGINAL INDEX: FOR REFERENCE ONLY

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